

# AMAZING STORIES™



**J.J. Abrams on  
Alias, Lost,  
and M:I-3**

**Director Rob Bowman  
Resurrects  
Elektra**

**Paul Chadwick Takes  
The Matrix Online**

**Relaunching  
Battlestar  
Galactica**

**Conversations with  
Terry Pratchett and  
Gregory Benford**

**Original Stories By** David Gerrold, Keith R.A. DeCandido,  
Jay Bonansinga, Benjamin Percy, Greg van Eekhout

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# WORLD WARCRAFT

MASSIVELY EPIC ONLINE





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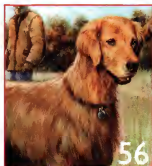
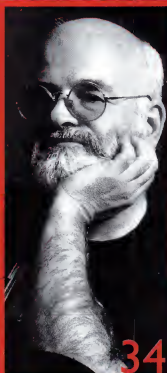
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## REVIEWS»

[illegible]

# Where Do We Go from Here?

As the new head honcho at Amazing Stories, it's tempting to spend a lot of time dwelling on the past. The publication has a rich history, which I am readily reminded of each day, not only by calls and emails from writers pitching ideas and vendors seeking publicity for their products, but also by the bound volumes of practically every issue of the magazine lining the hallway outside my office. Yet as appealing as it is to look back, asking colleagues and predecessors how and why things were done, a far more important question is really, "Where do we go from here?"

Ironically, though I'm far more concerned about the future than the past, that query evokes strong memories for me, as the first science-fiction book I recall purchasing was an anthology titled *Where*

*Do We Go from Here?* I was still in grammar school, and the paperback—which cost \$1.25 of my hard-earned lawn-mowing money—was filled with genuinely amazing stories. The initial tale in the volume, "A Martian Odyssey," had me intrigued, and by the time I got to works like "—And He Built a Crooked House—" and "Surface Tension," I was utterly hooked. I hope to instill that same incredible yet indescribable sense of wonder in the new Amazing Stories.

To a great extent I think we're already doing that. Our distinctive mix of media coverage, storyteller interviews, informed reviews, and original fiction is unparalleled. It's a blend I firmly believe will enthrall, enlighten, and excite both longtime and neophyte fans of science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror. However, there's always room for improvement.

Which is where you come in. I'd love to know what areas of the magazine you'd like to see enhanced. Which authors do you want to see published or interviewed in Amazing Stories? What upcoming movies, TV shows, novels, and computer games do you hope to learn more about? Do we have too much coverage of comic books or not enough? How about anime?

We have lots of things planned... tales from Grand Masters and yet-to-be-discovered writers, features on

the storytellers behind both the big summer blockbusters and the little-known independent films, and hundreds of book, DVD, comics, and audio reviews. We've got a wide-reaching vision, but it's not immutable. Your input can and will make a difference.

Which brings me, ahem, back to the future. Back to when I was a youngster, first becoming excited by stories from authors like Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Arthur C. Clarke. Back to my initial thought each day as I walk into the Amazing Stories office. Back to my overriding question: *Where do we go from here?*

Email me or let me know via the messageboards at [paizo.com/amazing](http://paizo.com/amazing). I'm eager to hear your answer.



Jeff Berkwitz  
Editor-in-Chief  
[amazing@paizo.com](http://amazing@paizo.com)



## About the Cover

Jennifer Garner, best known for playing Sydney Bristow on *Alois*, kicks the mayhem up a notch in *Elektra*.

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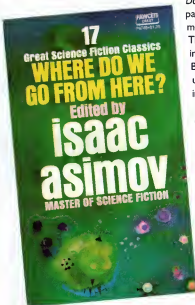
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## Coming up in AMAZING STORIES 609:

Director Francis Lawrence takes *Constantine* from comics to the silver screen

Clive Barker raises hell with his latest books... for kids

A brand-spankin'-new Sam Gunn tale from author Ben Bova

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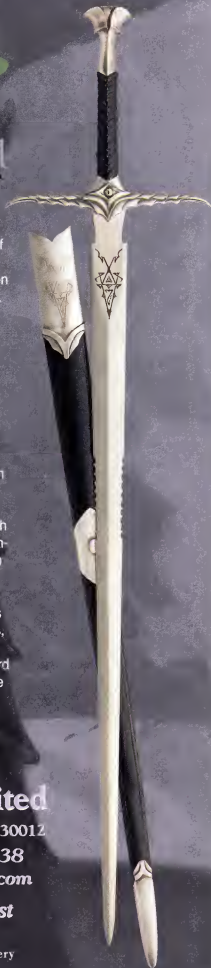
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## Battle of the Sexes

How important is sex in science fiction, fantasy, and supernatural horror? We don't mean the physical act, of course, but rather whether the writer of a given story is a man or a woman. And how about the intended audience—does a tale written by a man affect a female reader differently than a similar adventure penned by a woman? Our first correspondent seems to think so, and clearly so do a number of other science-fiction lovers. In fact, Mike Resnick, an author who has already contributed a couple of works to *Amazing Stories* (with more to come in the future), edited two anthologies—*Women Writing Science Fiction as Men* and *Men Writing Science Fiction as Women*—exploring the idea that perhaps there is a difference in the approaches taken by male and female writers to storytelling.

What do you think? Does the gender of the author make a difference in how they approach telling a story? And equally important, should it make a difference? We'd love to hear your point of view, so write to us at [amazing@paizo.com](mailto:amazing@paizo.com) (type "Dis-patches" in the subject line) or:

Amazing Stories—Dispatches  
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You can also visit our messageboards ([paizo.com/amazing](http://paizo.com/amazing)) to address this topic or simply join the latest conversations about the new *Amazing Stories*.

## Amazing Women, Too!

I have just received my fourth issue of the new incarnation of *Amazing Stories*. The short stories are my favorite part of your magazine, and I must say that I've enjoyed all of the twenty you've published so far.

However, while looking back through your high-quality glossy pages to admire your fine work, I noticed an imperfection—out of the stories you've published so far, only one was written by a woman ("The Mutable Borders of Love," by Leslie Whit, in issue 605). I also noticed that your submission guidelines state that "most of our editorial content is solicited."

Taken together, this implies to me two possibilities. One: you might have some bias against publishing stories by women. (Nah, that couldn't be right! I'm a subscribing reader, and I'm female, so you must have some interest in appealing to both genders.) Or two: since you seem to have a slightly stronger percentage of men on your editorial staff, maybe you're just a bit bashful about asking the women writers to do stories for you.

That's easily fixed. The website [sfn.net](http://sfn.net) is a gathering place on the Internet for all types of genre writers of both genders. Click on their "People Pages" link, and from there you can find a host of female writers to solicit stories from to help round out your reader appeal. The folks who run [sfn.net](http://sfn.net) are friendly and might even be willing to set up an announcement or discussion forum for you to make a call for submissions from female writers.

Patricia Buehler  
Chapel Hill, NC

While we don't accept or solicit stories based on whether they're written by men or women—we simply want the most amazing stories out there, regardless of an author's gender—we think you'll find that, as word continues to filter out about the new *Amazing Stories*, the mix of our writers will become more diverse. In fact, we've already had a couple of tales from women writers in *Amazing Stories* 607 ("The Wisdom of Disaster," by Nina Kiriki Hoffman, and "Jimmy and Cat," by Gail Sproule), with more planned for future issues, and our door always remains open to considering more imaginative prose. Submission guidelines are at [paizo.com/amazing/submission-guidelines](http://paizo.com/amazing/submission-guidelines).

## JOIN THE AMAZING STORIES COMMUNITY!

Visit our messageboards at  
[paizo.com/amazing](http://paizo.com/amazing) and let us know how we're doing!

## On the Edge

It was Ted White's *Amazing Stories* that got me collecting science-fiction magazines. So you see, *Amazing Stories* holds a dear place in my heart. What do I think of the new *Amazing Stories*? Not sure just yet, but I read the first three issues from cover to cover. I guess that's some indication.

Laszlo Urbanszki  
Ambarvale, Australia

## Wanting More Variety ... or Not

Congratulations on the relaunch of a venerable title. I saw some commentary over on the *Asimov's* forum, so I made a point to look for you on the newsstand. I think the last time I found you was way back in 1998.

One more kudo—I loved the Paul Di Filippo story ("Shadow-boxer," *Amazing Stories* 606). Quite good, and, of course, very gutsy and topical. I also love Time Machine: only *Amazing Stories* can offer such a department so authoritatively.

Having said all of that, I fear that once again *Amazing Stories* will not last long. Placement on the newsstand over by *Variety* and *Starlog* can't help—you need to move over by *Realms of Fantasy* if you expect any repeat customers to find you. Speaking only for myself, though I sincerely doubt I'm alone, I couldn't care less about movie directors or Hollywood hype.

All the media "sci-fi" coverage is going to doom you. It can't compete with *Starlog* and the other dedicated media fan titles. Frankly, it's all available free on the Internet to anyone interested, so such an emphasis can't possibly appeal to those looking for cutting-edge fiction, which is the traditional niche for *Amazing Stories*.

Looking at the contents of issues 603 through 605—and I admit I may be judging you on too narrow a sample—the earlier issues looked stronger fictionwise.

In any case, I took the online survey [and] registered my vote for more fiction and less coverage of movies, DVDs, comics, etc.

E is for ELEVATOR PEOPLE ...  
They have pressed the wrong  
button too many times ... They  
at the numbers as they light  
and then go off, riding up and  
down even after night has fallen.  
... Once you saw one of them,  
and her eyes were filled with  
screams.  
—[Hart] Ellison, "[From A to Z, in the] Chocolate Alphabet"

N. LAWMOWER MAN  
O. AUEL  
P. THREE-EYED FISH  
Q. ETHAN OF ATHOS  
R. ATOMIC BETTY  
S. LEO  
T. PHOTOMETERS  
U. H.R. PUFFNSTUFF  
V. ACATHA  
W. BURT WARD  
X. EUGENE  
Y. TWELVE MONKEYS

A. HIGH FANTASY  
B. ENTER THE DRAGON  
C. LOTTERY  
D. LESTER DEL REY  
E. IPHIGENIA  
F. SEVERED HEADS  
G. OZYMANDIAS  
H. NEPHEW  
I. COFFINS  
J. HENRY PENNY  
K. KUTPOSTS  
L. COVENANT  
M. OVER THE EDGE

**SHAFTED**  
**Answer**  
**Key**  
(see puzzle,  
page 10.)



If you don't double or triple your fiction content, I won't subscribe, but I'll keep watching for you on the newsstand.

Best of luck,  
**Rob Roy Hathaway**  
 Mansfield, TX

We actively try to avoid ubiquitous Hollywood hype, focusing instead on talking with the movers and shakers behind the stories (directors, screenwriters, and so on) along with authors and other individuals involved in actually creating and telling amazing stories in all forms. At the same time, our mix of fiction and nonfiction is, we believe, unique. As you page through *Amazing Stories* on the newsstand, hopefully you'll be enticed to explore some of these articles, too. Who knows? One day you may even opt to subscribe!

## Erotica, But No Amazing?

Today I received my copy of *Amazing Stories* 605, and while I have only given it a cursory look, the things that immediately drew my attention were John Picacio's fantastic artwork for "Dream of Earth" [Jack Williamson's 1,000 Words story], the "Back to the Future" nonfiction feature (which leads me to ask, can Hollywood

recycle itself forever, or will they ever use something original and innovative from that great pool of writers out there?), and one of the letters in *Dispatches* [a letter from Jetse was featured in that issue, too].

As an aside, I also went to the American Bookshop here in Amsterdam today. Their first floor is completely dedicated to science fiction, fantasy, and horror. (And erotica, I might add. In fact, in the place where they had the genre anthologies last time I visited, there is now an erotica section. Things change, I guess.) On the magazine stands there were (among a lot of other publications) issues of *Dragon* and *Dungeon* [both also published by Paizo Publishing], but not of *Amazing Stories*.

Typical.  
 But all was well when I found issue 605 on my doormat.  
**Jetse DeVries**  
 Den Bosch, The Netherlands

## Wow!

*Amazing Stories* 605 arrived today, and I just finished reading "A Wow Finish." Well ... wow. I was blown away. It was so bittersweet and beautiful, and it brought back so many good memories. This is the first science-fiction story I've

ever read that I'm actually going to clip and mail to my mom.

**Amber Scott**  
 Olivette, MO

## Wow! Wow!

I'm going to second Amber's comments on "A Wow Finish." I love Cosoblonco. Anytime I see a guy named Rick, I feel compelled to say, "Help me, Rick" in my best (but not very good) Peter Lorre voice.

I've also been able to get several of my friends over the years to sit down and watch it for the first time, and each time, it played out like in the story.

Great movie. Great story.  
**Casey Jacobson**  
 Seoul, South Korea

## DISAGREE WITH AN OPINION EXPRESSED IN DISPATCHES?

Visit our messageboards at  
[paizo.com/amazing](http://paizo.com/amazing) and let us know!

## J.J. Abrams—What Are You Reading?

The creator of *Alias* and *Lost* replies.

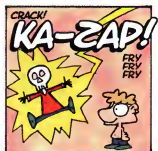
"Currently, sadly, the stuff I'm reading is the stuff I've had to read: outlines and things. I have two kids, they're five and six, and when I go home, all I want to do is not read anything."

"But recently, I read *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear*, by Jim Steinmeyer. It's a very interesting book about the magical experiences for stage magicians—how magicians learned to make the elephant disappear. It has a great behind-the-scenes piece about Houdini (in 1918 at New York's Hippodrome Theater) making the elephant disappear. It tells the great mystery of how he did it and how it developed. I've always been really obsessed with the idea of magic and how it works. This book was a real treat, a very cool book."

See our interview with J.J. Abrams starting on page 20.

## REDSHIRTS

by John Kovalic



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# SHAFTED

by Mike Selinker

The grid on the next page contains a quotation from a literary work. Transfer the letters from each answer to the grid and vice versa. Reading down the first letters of the answers, you'll spell the author's name and the name of the work.

- A. Tolkien's genre (two words) 115 148 173 127 218 232 49 101 11 61 82
- B. In it, Bruce Lee fights in a hall of mirrors (three words) 28 165 47 208 70 88 227 7 78 216 98 152 143 196
- C. Shirley Jackson story ending in a stoning, with "The" 8 51 113 175 231 30 129
- D. Late SF editor with an eponymous imprint (three words) 181 121 234 12 210 108 157 31 220 40 1 65
- E. Daughter sacrificed to Artemis by Agamemnon 150 111 25 58 97 197 42 219 74
- F. What Vlad the Impaler impaled (two words) 213 60 163 9 96 73 137 22 188 112 149 33
- G. Character in DC's *Watchmen* named for a Shelley poem 13 99 189 59 177 151 206 225 135 32
- H. Narnia chronicle *The Magician's* 85 116 29 139 103 214
- I. Rest spots for Lestat 83 159 146 199 2 66 125
- J. Domsday prophet of children's lit (two words) 133 20 186 86 104 72 222 156 117 211
- K. Bases often found on asteroids 41 110 200 154 190 123 50 71
- L. Doubting Thomas of the Stephen R. Donaldson trilogies 229 195 68 23 184 54 141 168
- M. Collection from the author of the quotation (three words) 87 27 140 6 62 207 183 128 223 43 100
- N. Film that infamously "cut up" a Stephen King story (two words) 19 204 39 161 53 185 224 215 170 119 107 77
- O. *Clan of the Cave Bear* author Jean M. 193 118 109 182
- P. What Blinky is, on *The Simpsons*: (two words, hyphenated) 226 174 147 81 202 16 56 91 158 4 131 192 37
- Q. Title obstetrician in a Lois McMaster Bujold SF novel (three words) 164 134 80 155 55 17 179 26 106 201 5 228

R. Cartoon Network's  
galaxy-saving teenybopper  
(two words)

84 57 144 203 172 187 44 69 21 114 93

S. Regulus begins its mane

221 162 94

T. Devices for measuring  
answer 5, say

15 102 198 138 52 89 38 126 67 230 3

U. Sid and Marty Krofft's  
evocatively named  
dragon (three words)

63 122 18 45 145 136 178 79 95 167

V. Precog who asks "Is  
it now?" in Minority  
Report

166 132 76 36 176 124

W. Robin to Adam West's  
Batman (two words)

120 191 14 46 160 180 209 35

X. Roddenberry's full  
first name

64 153 142 212 171 90

Y. Willis-Pitt sci-fi  
Mindbender (two words)

92 194 169 130 10 34 233 48 205 75 217 24 105

1D		2I	3T		4P	5Q	6M		7B	8C	9F	10Y	11A	12D	13G	14W		15T	16P	17Q	18U	19N	20J	
21R	22F	23L	24Y		25E	26Q	27M	28B		29H	30C	31D	32G	33F	34Y	35W		36V	37P	38T		39N	40D	41K
42E	43M		44R	45U	46V	47B	48Y	49A		50K	51C	52T		53N	54L	55Q	56P		57R	58E	59G	60F	61A	
62M	63U	64X	65D		66I	67T	68L	69R	70B		71K	72J	73F	74E	75Y		76V	77N	78B		79U	80Q	81P	82A
	83I	84R	85H	86J	87M	88B		89T	90X	91P	92Y		93R	94S	95U	96F		97E	98B	99G	100M		101A	102T
103H	104J		105Y	106Q	107N	108D	109O		110K	111E		112P	113C		114R	115A	116H		117J	118O	119N	120W	121D	122U
123K	124V	125I		126T	127A	128M	129C		130Y	131P	132V	133J	134Q		135G	136U	137F		138T	139H	140M	141L		
142X	143B		144R	145U	146I		147P	148A	149F	150E	151G	152B		153X	154K		155Q	156J	157D		158P	159I	160W	161N
	162S	163F	164Q	165B		166V	167U	168L	169Y	170N		171X	172R	173A	174P	175C		176V	177G	178U		179Q	180W	181D
182O	183M	184L		185N	186J	187R	188F		189G	190K	191W		192P	193O	194Y		195L	196B	197E		198T	199I		200K
201Q	202P	203K		204N	205Y	206G		207M	208B	209W		210D	211J	212X	213F		214H	215N	216B	217Y		218A	219E	220D
221S	222J	223M		224N	225G	226P	227B		228Q	229L	230T	231C	232A	233Y	234D									

Answers  
on page 8



Illustration by Randy Martinez

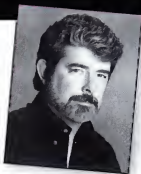


## STAR WARS TV?



Multiple sources have hinted at a *Star Wars* television series, likely entering production within a year after the release of *Revenge of the Sith*. Although George Lucas has thus far not openly confirmed any plans, Jeff Ulin, the senior director of distribution and business affairs at Lucasfilm, cryptically disclosed to *Variety* that "Lucasfilm would like to move into TV programming after *Star Wars: Episode III*."

Actually, the most palpable admission of these plans comes from overseas. In an interview with *License!* Europe magazine, Howard Roffman, president of licensing for Lucasfilm, flat out stated that "in autumn 2006 there will be a complete live-action *Star Wars* TV series made by Lucasfilm." Stay tuned. ...



## Stake Out



Hopes for a fresh *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Angel* television spinoff were dashed with the news that creator Joss Whedon has asked to be released from his long-standing contract with Twentieth Century Fox TV. He told *Variety* magazine, "I spent a lot of time trying to think what my next series would be, [and] I couldn't think of anything. When that happens, it generally means something is just not working. I didn't feel like I could come up with anything that the networks would want."

At about the same time, Sarah Michelle Gellar informed *Sci Fi Wire* she had turned down an offer to provide the voice of *Buffy Summers* in a possible *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* animated series. Her refusal apparently centered on the fear that the show might "jump the shark" for her character, as the pitch she viewed had her vampire slayer possessing magical powers such as the ability to transmutate. Her decision, coupled with Whedon's departure, could conceivably put the final stake in any dreams for further *Buffy* adventures, at least on the small screen.





## The WAR of the WORLDS

By H.G. Wells

Author of "Under the Kille," "The Time Machine," etc.



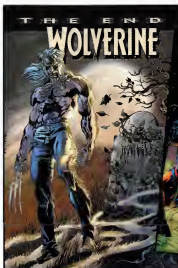
## Two World Wars?

*War of the Worlds* may well turn into a battle between David and Goliath later this year. With Steven Spielberg currently wrapping his big-budget interpretation of the H.G. Wells tale, Pendragon Pictures has another version—produced in secret over the past three years—already in the can.

Pendragon CEO Timothy Hines covertly created his *War of the Worlds* under the working title *The Great Boer War*, filming on location in England and the Pacific Northwest. It purports to be "the world's first authentic adaptation of the H.G. Wells classic 1898 novel," according to Hines, who spoke with [scifidimensions.com](http://scifidimensions.com). "We have, point by point, recreated the book for the screen."



Hines graciously claims that both versions can coexist. "Our production ... is set at the turn of the century," he notes. "We're almost a backstory to their version, sort of like a prequel." While a specific release date is still up in the air for the Pendragon Pictures rendition of *War of the Worlds*, the Spielberg interpretation, which stars Tom Cruise, Tim Robbins, and Miranda Otto [*The Lord of the Rings*], is presently scheduled for a June 2005 debut.



## X-Men X-citement

After months of rumors concerning a possible Wolverine movie, news recently surfaced in *Variety* that Troy Benioff has been hired to write the X-Men spinoff feature. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that plans to make the film are firm. Benioff—who also wrote the screenplay for last year's Brad Pitt blockbuster *Troy*—was hired with the expectation that Fox will be able to persuade Hugh Jackman to reprise his role as the title character. As of press time, that deal had not been closed.



## New He-Man

*Variety* recently revealed that John Woo (*Face/Off*, *Mission: Impossible 2*) has been hired to direct and produce a live-action *He-Man* feature film, with a screenplay penned by Mouse Hunt and *Small Soldiers* scribe Adam Rifkin. Will this simply be a vehicle for selling licensed merchandise, or can Woo's unique visual style rise above the franchise's action-figure origins to create a powerful barbarian movie like the original *Conan*? While the results weren't too pretty in 1987, the first time the characters jumped to the big screen (in  *Masters of the Universe*, with Dolph Lundgren portraying He-Man and Frank Langella playing the evil Skeletor), given Woo's record, hopes remain high for this attempt.



## Groovy Movie



Mark Evanier, cocreator with Sergio Aragones of the *Groo the Wanderer* comic series, disclosed on his website ([newsfromme.com](http://newsfromme.com)) that the duo has "made a deal with a big-time motion-picture producer [Marc Toberoff's Intellectual Properties Worldwide] to develop a big-time motion picture of everyone's favorite idiot warrior, Groo." Aragones, who's best known for his "Spy vs. Spy" features in *MAD Magazine*, created Groo with Evanier in 1983. As part of the deal, the duo will write the screenplay for the possible feature film and also be credited as executive producers.

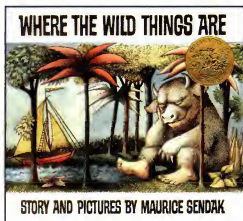


## Campbell Soups Up



Fans of Bruce Campbell's geriatric Elvis—introduced and immortalized in *Bubba Ho-Tep*—may one day have another opportunity to see the beloved character. Director Don Coscarelli recently told MyMovies.net that "things are looking quite good. MGM was very happy with the results [of *Bubba Ho-Tep*] in the States... and Bruce would love to play some more of the old hound dog! So there's a good chance we actually will make that film."

The follow-up feature, which Coscarelli admits is still in the earliest stages of development, is tentatively titled *Bubba Nosferatu: Curse of the She-Vampires*.



## Wild Things Tamed



Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* has bounced around Hollywood for two decades, but *Variety* reports that Universal Pictures is finally about to start production on the film. While the company obtained the rights from Columbia Pictures six years ago, the 1963 children's classic—about a mischievous boy who becomes ruler of an imaginary forest filled with wild and exotic monsters—was actually in development at Disney as far back as the 1980s.

Long planned as a CG tale, *Where the Wild Things Are* is being reinvented for this production by director Spike Jonze (*Adaptation*, *Being John Malkovich*) as a live-action movie. Michael Goldenberg (*Peter Pan*, *Contact*) has been hired to write a fresh screenplay.



## Even Online, Kong Is King



The release date for Peter Jackson's eagerly awaited remake of *King Kong* is still almost a year away, but loyal devotees of the supersized simian can readily follow the production from the comfort of their own homes via the Internet. Although there are myriad fan sites devoted to the picture, *KongIsKing.net* is the only one featuring an ongoing production diary from the director.

Created and maintained by the same cadre of volunteers that fashioned *TheOneRing.net* (a fan site for Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* movies that still gets over twenty million hits per month), *KongIsKing* has both the director's approval and direct input. "Having Peter's blessing and participation has provided *KongIsKing.net* with a kind of dream perspective on the production process," says site designer Chris Pirrota. "[That's] something that was not readily available with *The Lord of the Rings*."

On the site, Jackson narrates a production diary via digital vignettes provided courtesy of Universal Studios, keeping fans up-to-date on everything from a day-one welcome from the set in Wellington, New Zealand, to a tour of the S.S. Venture, a 1930s-era research vessel. He also includes greetings from cast members Naomi Watts (*The Ring*) and Jack Black (*School of Rock*) and even a primer on how the "poop wrangler" creates convincing monkey dung.

In addition to the production diary, *KongIsKing* boasts a robust messageboard and twenty-four-hour chat rooms where fans can discuss and debate the movie. Plus, you never know who might check in at the site. "Many of the cast and crew pop in to look at the latest news," reveals Michael Regina, *KongIsKing*'s editor-in-chief. "We still have an active Weta [Jackson's production company and special-effects crew] readership."

Even so, there are plans to offer even more interactive opportunities. "We are still in the planning stages for many events on *KongIsKing*," adds Regina. "We want to host interviews and live chats, contests, and giveaways. Our years on *TheOneRing.net* have given us a chance to know what the fans like and look forward to."



## Scarlet Letters



Though the live-action *Thunderbirds* film elicited jeers from most longtime aficionados of Gerry Anderson's Supermarionation heroes, those same fans could soon have reason to cheer. Late last year TriMedia Entertainment Group and Sony Pictures Entertainment announced plans to launch a new television adventure based upon another Anderson property, *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterians*. "When the original *Captain Scarlet* went on air it was a phenomenal hit from day one," claims Anderson. "We are proud of being able to use innovative CG animation to bring this outstanding series to life."

Though distribution details are still being worked out, the first twenty-six episodes of Gerry Anderson's *New Captain Scarlet* are already in production at Pinewood Studios in England.



## Stamping Out Godzilla

The tables have finally been turned on Godzilla. After more than fifty years of stomping all over the buildings and people of Tokyo, visitors to Hollywood now have an opportunity to trample on the "Big G." In late November the legendary big-screen beast at last received a well-deserved star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Visitors can look for (and, if they choose, stamp upon) the star on the sidewalk near the fabled Grauman's Chinese Theatre. The twenty-eighth—and supposedly last—movie in the long-running franchise, aptly titled *Godzilla Final Wars*, opened in Japan in December.



## Hippocratic Harmonies



When at a loss for ideas, writers often turn to music for inspiration. So it's probably not too surprising that musicians also now and again rely on literature to spark their imaginations. That's precisely what Grammy Award-winning jazz pianist Chick Corea did when struggling with a recent string-quartet commission.

"After I was about three minutes into the first movement, I found myself fishing around for text, when bingo, this lovable character out of L. Ron Hubbard's *Ole Doc Methusalem* series named Hippocrates came to mind," he recalls. "He's kind of a predecessor to R2-D2: a four-armed little guy who weighs five hundred pounds and remembers everything he sees and hears. So I took that as a point of inspiration and wrote five different views of Hippocrates."

The composition, *The Adventures of Hippocrates*, received its world premiere in Santa Fe, New Mexico, late last summer, and plans are presently in the works for the piece to be recorded by the famed Orion Quartet.

"I'm having a ball with this," laughs Corea, adding that last year he also released a full-length CD inspired by Hubbard's novel *To the Stars*. "I'm finding that my music really flows when I'm working with texts that truly inspire me."

## Frankenstein Lives Again!

The year 2004 was awfully busy for Frankenstein's monster, with the beleaguered brute appearing in not only *Van Helsing*, but also two separate television miniseries. However, it looks like the fabled fiend will get a workout this year too, as a new, as-yet-untitled independent feature starring the creature is set to begin filming in February.

"Though obviously working on a budget, we're striving to evoke a classic-horror atmosphere," says cult-movie producer-director William Winckler, who's best known for *The Double-D Avenger*, an over-the-top homage to filmmaker Russ Meyer. "Old-time Frankenstein fans won't be disappointed."





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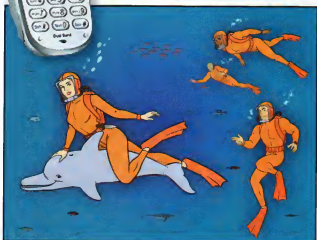




## Death of a Spaceman

He never put pen to paper or rode a real rocket, but in the early 1950s actor Ed Kemmer inspired youngsters across America—many of whom grew up to be writers, scientists, and engineers. As Commander Buzz Corey on the kids' TV show *Space Patrol*, Kemmer, who died late last year at the age of eighty-four, led impressionable viewers on myriad “missions of daring in the name of interplanetary justice.”

“Buzz Corey was my first, last, and always space hero,” recalls science-fiction novelist and screenwriter David Gerrold (*Star Trek: Land of the Lost*). “Everybody else is second-best. I’ll always be grateful for the adventures of mind and spirit we shared together.”



## “Cel” Phones

Can you see me now? Believe it or not, animation fans will soon be able to switch on their cell phones and watch their favorite animated adventures. Cartoon Network has signed an exclusive deal to provide streaming audio and video content for Sprint PCS Vision phones. The service costs \$3.95 per month and offers video clips from shows like *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Dexter's Laboratory*. A separate channel supplies scenes from such Adult Swim adventures as *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* and *Sealab 2021*.

“This new venture represents a big step for Cartoon Network in our efforts to create distinctive ‘micronetworks,’” says Jim Samples, the network’s executive vice president and general manager. “They truly are ... a traveling companion for any fan of the fantastic or ridiculous.”



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# F SPIES AND SURVIVORS

*J.J. Abrams Says It's the Small Moments that Make Alias and Lost Work for Him*

by Kevin Dilmore



J.J. Abrams's imaginative tales of cunning secret agents and resourceful island castaways spark your imagination, then you have his childhood immersion into pop culture to thank ... or blame.

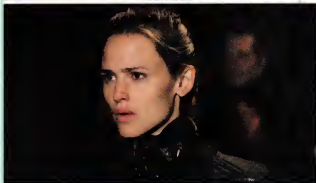
"I loved all sorts of movies and television," says Abrams, the thirty-eight-year-old creator of the espionage series *Alias* and the breakout hit adventure *Lost*, both of which air on ABC. "I loved Irwin Allen disaster movies, James Bond movies. I was a fan of the cheesy ABC shows of the 1970s like *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Bionic Woman*. When I was a kid, I loved all that stuff."

And it's likely that ABC executives are glad he did. Enthusiasm is high for the start of the fourth season of *Alias*, which Abrams promises will bring many elements of the show in line with what made the series about agent Sydney Bristow popular in the first place. And ratings remain robust for *Lost*, a program Abrams developed from a straightforward idea concerning the struggles of a group of airline-crash survivors on an island that may not be all it seems. The fact that *Lost* has enjoyed such success took many people by surprise, including Abrams.

"We just tried to do a show. We just busted our ass collectively and tried to make the best pilot we could and hoped it would be put on the air and that we would survive well enough to stay on," he claims. "Felicity and *Alias* were the only two shows I'd ever worked on. Those shows both survived for years as sort of cult successes, not really mainstream shows but with incredibly loyal fan bases. I assumed having had only that experience that if *Lost* were successful, it would be successful on that level. To be doing the numbers that the show is currently doing ... I would have laughed in disbelief if you had said that's what was going to happen."

Born in New York but raised in Los Angeles, Abrams cut his eyeteeth on many of the same movies and television shows that peers of his generation continue to enjoy. He's quick to point to now-classic comedies like *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Taxi* as well as science-fiction-influenced dramas such as *The Incredible Hulk* and the aforementioned "bionic duo" as big influences upon his imagination.

"For me, *The Twilight Zone* is ultimately the benchmark," says Abrams (see "A Land of Both Shadow and Substance" on page 23). "I love all sorts of movies. As an adolescent, I was obsessed with horror films. To me, *An American Werewolf in London* is one of the seminal movies because it's ultimately a love story, but it's incredibly funny. It works on so many different







levels. I've actually cited that a number of times as one of the movies I'd love to be able to do something like. I love David Cronenberg's films [*The Fly*, *Naked Lunch*]. I'm a huge fan of makeup effects and special effects. I love whatever Dick Smith [makeup artist on films such as *The Exorcist* and *The Hunger*] is working on. I started writing fan letters to him when I was fourteen. He's just brilliant."

While loving it all, Abrams was also getting a real feel for how those stories made their way to the screen. After accompanying his grandfather on a tour of a Hollywood studio, the filmmaking bug bit Abrams hard. He scooped up the family Super-8 camera and started making his own movies—and just kept at it. As a senior project at Sarah Lawrence College, Abrams teamed with a friend to write a screenplay that ultimately was bought by Touchstone Pictures and made into the 1990 comedy *Taking Care of Business*. He went on to write screenplays for *Regarding Henry* and the science-fiction-tinged romance *Forever Young*, a script that remains a point of reference for the writer.

"It's a genre-influenced mainstream story. That's something I love to do and aspire to," he says. "Some times I do it better than others, but it's definitely an ambition in almost everything I work on: making an amalgam of genres that you don't expect to see used together."

As Abrams continued to write, most notably the screenplay for the 1998 science-fiction-action movie *Armageddon*, he began trying his hand at producing as well. This led him from the big screen to television, where in 1998 he cocreated the coming-of-age series *Felicity* for the fledgling WB network. The show proved popular with a core group of viewers, and it allowed Abrams to pursue what he says he's always enjoyed about writing: capturing small, private moments that resonate with viewers, then weaving them into a narrative whole that's compelling to watch.

"I'm not sure how the process works in me," he muses, "but I know that when I'm writing, there'll be moments that will occur to me inspired by a premise, and then the premise changes inspired by moments. Then moments change and new ones appear because of what the premise is telling you. Then another idea occurs to you, but that means the premise will change. It's sort of writing as nanotechnology, creating something from nothing. There is no tried-and-true method. It just sort of happens in the weird way it happens, and you hope at the end of the day that the piece works as a whole and you can't quite tell which idea inspired which."

## ENTER SYDNEY BRISTOW

After several years of focusing on *Felicity*, the pleasure of creating those small moments began to wane for Abrams. He yearned to write something with dramatic stakes a few notches higher than the romantic turmoil of a college coed. What started as a joke that he might throttle some action into the show by having protagonist Felicity Porter secretly recruited into the CIA ended up taking hold in the writer's imagination. Thus was born the concept of agent Sydney Bristow and the mind-twisting world of *Alias*.

"I wanted to do something that had more energy to it, a sort of missed that element, but I really did love doing the more intimate small stuff on *Felicity*," he says. "I felt like this was an idea that sort of combined both. Once I start working on an idea, the goal is always about making the idea exciting to me. I don't usually approach stories from the outside in, thinking, 'I want to do a spy show.' It was more about feeling something for the characters and getting inspired by the situation and the moment, and starting to see scenes in my head that I knew I wanted to write and direct."

*Alias* was Abrams's way of mixing storytelling elements that he had enjoyed his whole life, in many ways breaking the boundaries of a traditional spy show—focusing on a young woman who was more frightened building a relationship with her father than dismantling the nefarious SD-6 spy cell for whom she worked. For the past three years, Abrams has guided *Alias* plotlines along a labyrinthine path, entwining double agents, cutting-edge technology, and five-hundred-year-old prophecies with themes of family dysfunction, trusting friendships, and rocky romances. At any given time, *Alias* fans might be hard-pressed to determine which of the plot devices are more compelling.

"The truth is that the key, to me, is just being fluid and trusting my instincts," Abrams says. "Whether an idea comes from something that you dreamed about or something someone says, or you see something and you get an idea that isn't quite the same thing... wherever an idea comes from, when I'm writing it's always a question of being fluid enough to adjust



44 ... 45 ... 46 ...

As if the plot twists and character double-crosses in a typical episode of *Alias* weren't enough to keep viewers entertained, JJ Abrams and other writers of the spy series have woven their own numeric conspiracy into the fabric of Sydney Bristow's world—and keen-eyed fans have noticed.

Strawn here and there throughout all three seasons thus far are references both overt and cryptic to the number 47. On screen, the only clue to a common thread linking these recurring appearances of 47 is a preoccupation with that particular prime number held by Milo Rambaldi, the show's resident fifteenth-century visionary and prognosticator. Off screen, Abrams and other *Alias* creators politely smile and say little about this now-outed in-joke of theirs. It's a joke they share with fellow Hollywood perpetrators as well as casual observers of the 47 phenomenon, who point to its pervasiveness in areas as broad as world history and natural science and as esoteric as California's Pomona College and episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

One thing is certain: once tipped to the ever-present 47s, an *Alias* fan will be hard-pressed not to feel a tingle of recognition every time a new one crops up. Doubt it? Keep in mind this rundown of just a few of the

places that 47 appears in the convoluted story of agent Sydney Bristow (the specific episode title follows each example):

- A Rambaldi manuscript always yields significant information on its 47th page ("Page 47"). Once, key info was gleaned from page 94—the second 47th page in the document ("Countdown").
- Rambaldi's masterwork device is composed of 47 separate artifacts ("The Telling").
- Agents have decrypted 47 of Rambaldi's eerily accurate centuries-old predictions ("Q&A").
- Sydney's dream-state attempts to recall her forgotten memories lead her to a room 47 ("Conscious"), just one of myriad uses of 47 as a room designation.
- A key master computer for all SD cells is designated Server 47, which the Alliance keeps perpetually airborne aboard a specially designed (what else?) Boeing 747 ("Phase One").
- Übergeek Marshall Flinkman expresses his desire to increase a newly designed digital camera's capacity to 47 exposures ("Truth Be Told").
- The access code needed by reporter Will Tippin to enter a secure room and obtain secret data on SD-6 is 4747 ("The Coup").

# A LAND OF BOTH SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

Submitted for your approval: A twenty-first-century television writer and producer who draws his creative cues from a man who walked a similar career path more than fifty years earlier. Witness a young talent unafraid to turn conventional TV on its side, never hesitating to drag his fictional characters as well as his flesh-and-blood viewers into disquieting environments of social commentary, self-examination, and paranoia. You're ready to enter the mind of JJ. Abrams, one steeped at a young age on the stories and the atmosphere of ... *The Twilight Zone*.

And Abrams would have it no other way. The creator of television's *Alias* and *Lost* is quick to point to the 1950s and 1960s work of vanguard writer and producer Rod Serling as his greatest influence in the medium, and any comparisons drawn between his efforts and Serling's are sure to bring Abrams pause.

"Serling was such a genius and so ahead of his time, and such an idol for me. Any time that anyone says anything like that, I'm humbled," says Abrams of the man best known for creating as well as writing most of the episodes of *The Twilight Zone* anthology series. "The truth is that he was so beyond his contemporaries ... so beyond everything. His ideas always were pushing the imagination to places it hadn't gone. I think that ultimately the goal that we have, which is to tell stories that make people respond emotionally, was his. Serling used allegory and told stories that mattered to him, even when it got him in deep trouble with censors."

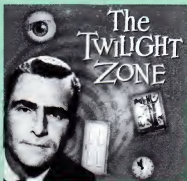
While Abrams has thus far avoided any problems with standards-and-practices personnel, his narrative choices have occasionally risked disenfranchising his television audience. In 2000, he indulged his *Twilight Zone* fantasies by modeling an episode of his young-adult drama *Felicity* directly on one of his favorite *Twilight Zone* tales, "Five Characters in

Search of an Exit." He even went so far as to contact *Twilight Zone* alumnus George Clayton Johnson to write the script (regrettably things did not work out, and Abrams ultimately wrote it himself) and hired renowned *Twilight Zone* director Lamont Johnson to helm it.

"It was a real exciting project for me," said Abrams of that second-season episode, which he titled "Help for the Lovelorn." "It was a straight homage in black-and-white and the whole thing."

And Abrams won't deny that his use of anthology-style storytelling devices in *Lost* draws its direct lineage from his love for *The Twilight Zone* and his admiration for Serling's work as a whole.

"I sort of feel like I haven't dared yet write about anything that is as literal as the stuff he was doing on TV prior to *The Twilight Zone*," says Abrams, pointing to Serling's scripts such as "Requiem for a Heavyweight" and "Patterns," written in the days of live television. "When Serling told stories that literally were issues of politics or race or economics, that's when he would get in trouble. When he told stories that were issues of human versus alien, suddenly he was cool."



what I'm thinking to fit that new idea and being open enough to allow the things that really matter to resonate. It's easy to get caught up in the sexier idea or the opportunity to work with an actor who is available. Then, you let yourself get sidetracked into believing something is more interesting to you than it really is. You have to trust your instincts and be very aware of just what it is you really love. When I get chills because someone brings up an idea for a scene that I just cannot wait to direct—when all I want to do right then is be on the floor directing that scene—then I know it's something worth doing."

That said, Abrams is the first to admit that living and breathing *Alias* for two years dulled his connection to the show during its third season. Putting some distance between himself and the program while working on other projects helped him fine-tune that focus again, and *Alias* fans will see that in the new season starting this month.

"When I had time away from the day-to-day grind, I recognized in watching the show that there were certain things I felt weren't quite clicking for me in the way that I thought they were when I was so caught up in it," he explains. "I thought that in many ways characters were being misused. The relationship between Sydney and Vaughn was in a frustrating place. There wasn't any resonance in having Dixon as her boss. I missed him being Sydney's partner and confidant and loyal friend. I missed not having any sense of Sydney's having a personal life at home, and I missed not getting into who she was as a person outside of the job. I missed Sloane not being in a position of power. A lot of things weren't quite where I'd



like them, and in the middle of it, it's hard to know. These are things we're trying to address and adjust this year."

## GETTING LOST

Abrams also is adjusting to having two television series in production at the same time. Now, when his head is not in a world of stealth and subterfuge, it's likely in a world of stranded airline passengers and their hostile tropical environment. *Lost*, which Abrams developed with coexecutive producer Damon Lindelof (*Crossing Jordan*), represents his closest brush yet with *Twilight Zone*-style storytelling.

"In a way," he says, "part of the secret to *Lost* is that every week has these flashbacks even though each has its familiar characters. In some ways *Lost* is an anthology show where you'll be having a different experience and seeing a different place than you're expecting to see each week. It's not a pure anthology, obviously, but it's the closest thing to sustaining almost half an hour of unique, unexpected story every week in a series that also gives you a familiar location. It's kind of a cool approach to TV storytelling."

It was not an approach that flew into Abrams' mind upon first hearing the nascent idea from Lloyd Braun, then-chairman of ABC Entertainment Television Group. "He called me and said, 'We want to do a show about people who survive a plane crash on an island.' I was like, 'Why? What the hell's that show? How would that work? I just didn't get it. Then I started thinking about ways [of doing it] that, for me at least, would be thrilling. If the island wasn't just an island and if you started to look at where they were as part of the ongoing story, it started to become increasingly clear that this was a big idea."

Abrams brought in Lindelof, then drafted *Alios* alumni Jesse Alexander and Jeff Pinkner, and between them they generated an outline for *Lost* exactly one week after Braun's phone call. Approval from ABC came the next day, and in twelve weeks from the day of that first phone call, Abrams turned in the two-hour pilot.

"It was crazy," Abrams recalls, "but any time that you get to work on something different than what came before, it's refreshing. The fun of doing this series is that we get to—every week—deal with an issue taken from the island and thematically connect it with something that's happening in one of our characters' backstories. So rather than just have people talk about themselves, we can witness events in people's lives. Being present, it allows for connections between some of these characters to actually be and feel deeper because we actually told these stories—it works not just for the viewers but for the writers as well. Charlie may reveal to Claire that he had a heroin addiction, but that's a story that we actually saw in various stages of his life. So to the audience, it doesn't just feel like, 'Oh wow, he used heroin?' We've actually experienced it with him. We've been there, so it's kind of cool."

And to hear Abrams tell it, the fact that *Lost* has found a broad audience will not affect his storytelling goals for the show.

"I'm not really honestly thinking about that," he says. "I'm more feeling like, 'What's the story for this next episode that will break my heart or get my heart pumping? What is the story of the show as we continue?' I'm thrilled that people are embracing a series that is alternately a romance and a science-fiction show and a mystery and a medical show and a survival show and a familial drama and a comedy in many regards. The idea for me is just telling stories that are compelling and hoping the audience cares



enough to keep watching. We're going to be doing a lot of stuff, and some of that stuff is out there and crazy, and other stuff is more relatable. But the goal always is going to be to keep it within a certain logic and quality, and hopefully people will continue to watch."

## GOOD MORNING, MR. ABRAMS ...

Abrams' next big mission—and he has chosen to accept it—is taking the helm of the third *Mission: Impossible* film, *M:I-3*, now prepping for a 2006 release. Tom Cruise will return as IMF agent Ethan Hunt in the big-budget action picture, and the actor offered Abrams the director's chair after watching the first two seasons of *Alios* on DVD. However, according to Abrams, the real mission of this sequel is to avoid resting on past successes or audience expectations. In fact, for him *M:I-3* is a dream project.

"I just feel like we have this amazing opportunity to tell a story that happens to be a great story. I feel like it has to be good despite its being *Mission: Impossible*, despite its starring someone who is a given box-office draw," he says. "*Alios* has been such incredible preparation for something like this. You take the world of espionage and look at what you can do to make it a story about people. That's been the mandate, and I'm very excited about what we're doing [on *M:I-3*]."

It's a pretty exciting time, Abrams admits, for someone whose childhood imagination was fueled with the stuff of towering infernos, American werewolves, and spies who loved him.

"There's always a place in my heart for the genre stuff that is more pulpy storytelling," says Abrams. "Look at *Jaws*, *Alien*, *Die Hard*, *Tootsie*, *Back to the Future*. They're all movies that if you pitched the story [to studio executives], you'd probably get a little, polite smile. But done as well as they were and with the commitment with which they were executed, they become as good as anything. To me, that's my favorite kind of story. It's something that's just left of real but done with the commitment and the respect for characters and the audience that any well-told drama would apply. When that happens, you've got something special." **AS**



Kevin Dilmore wrote about *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* in the October 2004 issue of *Amazing Stories*. His *Star Trek: S.C.E. story "Home Fires"* (with writing partner Dayton Ward) will be collected in a May 2005 paperback. He believes the mysteries of life are connected not by the number 47, but by 23.



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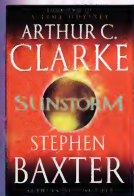


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she's

# electrifying



# THIS COMIC-BOOK ASSASSIN NEEDS NO ALIAS

by Resa Nelson



Chances are, you've already met Elektra. She's dark in nature, a little on the sullen side, and has a history of seeking revenge. Sound familiar?

If you caught 2003's *Daredevil*, you saw Ben Affleck play Matt Murdock, a blind man with superhearing that gives him weird radar vision. Maybe you remember the woman he meets in a coffee shop, a woman he follows outside. When he makes the mistake of asking her name, they get into a contest where they trade martial-arts skills while children on the playground surround them, yelling, "Fight! Fight!"

That woman, Elektra, portrayed by Jennifer Garner, becomes Murdock's girlfriend. A crime lord sends villain Bullseye to kill Elektra's father. In the process, Bullseye gets his hands on Daredevil's trademark weapon and hurls it at his assigned target. When Elektra witnesses her father's death, she assumes Daredevil is his killer, not yet knowing that her boyfriend and Daredevil are one and the same. Obsessed with vengeance, Elektra goes after Daredevil and injures him so badly he can't help her when Bullseye attacks. The villain slashes Elektra's throat, impales her on her own weapon, and leaves her for dead.

Yet as the movie ends, Murdock stumbles upon a necklace like the one Elektra wore—and it contains a message written in Braille.

Those wounds clearly weren't as mortal as they looked. Elektra lives. And now she has her own story to tell.

The character Elektra was created by legendary comic-book writer-artist Frank Miller when he accepted an assignment on Marvel Comics' *Daredevil*. Thanks to his efforts, the character became so popular that Marvel gave Elektra her own book.

Years later, history has repeated itself. Jennifer Garner was so appealing in the *Daredevil* motion picture that Twentieth Century Fox gave the actress her own *Elektra* movie.

However, there was one problem—while the studio wanted *X-Files* guru Rob Bowman to direct, he had no interest in crafting a superhero adventure. Studio executives would send Elektra scripts to him; he'd turn them



down. But the suits didn't give up. After all, Twentieth Century Fox was the studio behind *The X-Files*, and they'd seen Bowman win three Golden Globe Awards for producing and directing that series.

"They called me," Bowman says, "and said, 'We really want you to do this movie. Just come in and tell us what you want to do with it, and we'll talk about it.'"

Bowman stood his ground: he would not direct a run-of-the-mill superhero film.

It was a stance that worked, and with the studio's reluctant blessing, Bowman tried to reinvent the genre.

"It's kind of an old-fashioned notion—build the movie around a character," Bowman says. "That's the old-fashioned way of making movies anyway. I'm not taking credit for creating a kind of film that's never been made before, but I think in the modern age of high-profile, highly-funded superhero movies, wouldn't it be fresh to say there are other kinds of ways to make these movies? One is if you have an interesting enough character. Personally, I don't think Superman would be the kind of movie I could make. He's too nice a guy. He's kind of simple. Whereas Elektra has all these horrible past tragedies, and [they're] unjustified."

These tragedies are what Bowman really wanted to explore. He notes that while the Hollywood comic-book picture has grown as an overall genre, the most successful productions have focused on origin stories. In other words, the most important question becomes "How did the main character transform into who and what he or she is today?" To answer that vital question, Bowman turned to Miller's original tales.

In the eighties, Miller wrote two runs of the *Elektra* comics: *The Elektra Saga* and *Elektra: Assassin*. While the screenplay taps into both titles, *The Elektra Saga* really inspired the movie because it focuses on the story of how Elektra becomes an assassin.



Rob Bowman



Frank Miller



Gary Foster



Greg Rucka

## THE COMIC SIDE OF ELEKTRA

Frank Miller crafted his Elektra comics in the 1980s, but Elektra still lives, thanks to the storytellers who have followed in Miller's wake, including novelist and comic-book writer Greg Rucka.

"Miller created the story, wrote a brilliant, brilliant series of stories with her, and then killed her off," says Rucka. "Then he did a story where he brought her back to life. The Elektra tide has been off and on again at Marvel for quite awhile."

As for how he got the gig, Rucka believes that it was Brian Bendis, another Elektra writer, who recommended him.

"I was approached by the editor, Stuart Moore, who was the first editor on the book when they resurrected it at Marvel," Rucka explains. "One of the things that we talked about was the fact that as a villain she's untenable. It's very hard to sympathize with a sociopath."

Not surprisingly, as a writer, Rucka found Elektra, like many of the foes she faces in her adventures, to be quite a handful.

"Marvel viewed the character as a hero, and she's not. You can't be if you kill people for money," asserts the writer. "Murder is wrong—but not to Elektra. You don't go out through the in door—but guess what: she does. In its basest form, that's the appeal of Elektra."

As a young girl, Elektra is the child of a wealthy family. Unfortunately, her father makes a mistake when dealing with an organization known as the Hand, which wants to recruit Elektra and fashion her into a skilled warrior. When Elektra's dad refuses, the gang kills her mother and then, a bit later, her father. It was his death that was chronicled in *Daredevil*.

Next, Elektra becomes an assassin who cuts herself off from the world and lives only for her next contract. She becomes little more than a killing machine.

Though Bowman had never read the Elektra comics, he wasn't unfamiliar with the genre. "I grew up reading *Batman*," he notes. "The similarity between Batman and Elektra is [that] both have tortured souls. Elektra became interesting when I realized just how tortured and troubled on the inside she is."

When Bowman turned to the Elektra comic books, he began thinking about how the movie could be similar to the comics and how it would have to be different. "The comic book doesn't have to get a PG-13 rating, and the movie does," he claims. "There are a lot of elements in the comic book that I could never put in the movie, such as her sexual proclivity. [And] she's a very, very mean person in the comic book. But we can still explore plenty of darkness and not be too explicit and not deal at all with sexuality. There's enough anger and rage to be dealt with that I didn't see anything to be gained by it. It's certainly a nod to the comic book. I think the biggest thing is staying true to what drives her and what haunts her. That's where I try to stay in line with some of the Elektra comic-book literature."

Gary Foster, who produced *Daredevil* as well as Elektra, also points out the efforts to stay as true as possible to Miller's creation. "Frank is somebody that we spent time with," he reveals. "We met with him when we were shooting *Daredevil* in New York. He came to the set and met Jennifer and Ben Affleck. We maintained a relationship with Frank. He and Robert Rodriguez have been codirecting [the movie adaptation of] *Sin City*, which Frank also wrote and created, so he wasn't able to come visit us. But we share emails and he's acutely aware of the film, and if we ever needed guidance from him, he'd be there for us. We wouldn't be here if it weren't for him, so we really believe in keeping close."

## Leaving Sydney

At first glance, it may seem like Jennifer Garner is recreating another version of Sydney Bristow, the secret agent trying to live a normal life on TV's *Alias*. Don't be fooled. Elektra and Sydney have little, if anything, in common.

"It was very important to us and to Jennifer that [the character of Elektra be] unique and different," Foster says. "This character doesn't

relate to Sydney Bristow at all. The emotional journey and the physical performance are completely different. You have to go back to the lack of family: her mother dying, witnessing her father's death. Anybody she ever came close to and loved has been taken from her. This is a stoic woman. This is not somebody who is out to get revenge.

"She was trained to have certain skills, and she's good at it," continues Foster. "This is how she makes her money. She can do it because she doesn't feel anything. When something comes into her life to actually awaken that spirit, it makes her start to feel that she needs to protect something, or [that] she cares about something. It throws her into a tailspin because it's not something she remembers or really likes to do. It's too painful.

"To me, that's not *Alias*. That's not Sydney Bristow. Jennifer would tell you that every moment of every day on set. She would come to me and say, 'Was my walk different?' because she didn't want to walk like Sydney





Bristow. She didn't want to speak like Sydney Bristow. She's acutely aware of making sure that it's a different, full performance."

However, Garner's commitment to *Alias* presented one of the biggest challenges the filmmakers would face—time. Garner was on a short hiatus from the show, which meant she was available on a limited basis to film *Elektra*. Garner made up for the challenge with dedication and leadership, training seven days a week and performing almost all of her own stunts.

"From the emotional side, she's a really skilled actress," Foster says. "What's wonderful about her is that when she smiles, she's the West Virginia girl next-door with the dimples that you can't help but smile back at and love. There's a wonderful warmth to her. But when she doesn't smile, watch out! She's as dangerous as hell. She knows how to create a character that's serious but also gives the audience signs of the evolution."

"We talked a lot as we went through the movie about when she was actually going to smile, when she was going to show a little warmth, because that road map was essential to pulling this off. ... Most actors in general get trapped doing something that everybody expects them to do. I think the ones who last are the ones who are mysterious [so] you can't expect to see the same thing every time."

Bowman agrees. "Jennifer does such a good job feeling trapped in this body—as Elektra she'd rather be anybody else but herself—that you feel her struggle," he says. "Elektra is not a very good person, but the recipe of Jennifer playing this one black-hearted person, you just root for her to overcome. My job as the storyteller was to keep throwing rocks at her, make it harder and harder. When she realizes what her purpose is in life, then I try to make it even harder for her."

"She's just trying to do the right thing, and everybody's against her," maintains the director. "What is her fortitude? How strong is her constitution, and what is her level of tenacity to get through it? I think that's the part where you really empathize and say, 'Come on, you can do it.' That's where, hopefully, the little girls who are Jennifer's fans and the mothers and everybody in the audience are thinking, she just never gives up. That's the emotional journey that the audience goes on."

Foster has faith in Bowman's adaptation of *Elektra*, too. "[Bowman is] a really terrific guy," asserts the producer, who has worked with dozens of directors in his nearly two-decade Hollywood career. "He was able to make a film that is unique, as well as get it done in the time that we had. I think most directors probably would have had a breakdown, and he was so calm and so confident and so good about taking the time when we needed to get those moments and making sure that Jennifer got what she needed to give the performance. I've never seen a guy who understands camera the way he understands camera. He's an amazing director that way."

"He's a very bright guy, a very emotional guy. He cares a lot about the story. We fought really hard to maintain a certain aesthetic to the film. It is Hollywood, and you get a lot of pressure to make sure that certain things are there for trailers and marketing purposes, and while we understand and want that too, somebody's got to hold the line and make sure it doesn't cross over, that suddenly you get neither. Or you just get marketing tools



but the movie doesn't live up to what you want it to be. We dug our heels in at certain moments to make sure that the aesthetic that was important to all of us, including the studio, was maintained. It's very easy to bow to the pressure, and [Bowman] was unwilling to bow when he knew [something] was important to the movie. That's not about shooting. That's about understanding the story and the emotion of the movie."

That ability to understand the story and emotion was put to the test during a special screening of the adventure, when Bowman gave some of his X-Files pals an early peek at *Elektra*. "I showed [X-Files creator] Chris Carter and [X-Files star] David Duchovny and a lot of other friends, and they all come out thinking, 'This is really different and cool and emotional.' They dig it."

With such a positive buzz, there's little doubt that, before too long, the rest of the world will dig the film, too. **A**



Yvonne Navarro

## ELEKTRA HITS THE BOOKS

Like director Rob Bowman, novelist Yvonne Navarro had never read any of the *Elektra* comics. So why would she agree to write a novelization of the film?

"The character in the *Daredevil* movie definitely lit the fire of interest in me," she says. "The idea that Elektra was something more than just a one-dimensional comic-book warrior made her something extra-

special. My solo novels have always been heavy on characterization, so I can really get into a character—especially a woman with extraordinary martial-arts skills who has a tragic past, a terrible love loss, and a troubled existence."

Navarro's task wasn't easy. Elektra had already been transformed from Miller's graphic-novel heroine to a cinematic icon by Bowman and his screenwriters. How did Navarro tackle the task of putting Elektra on the printed page, where the character would live for the first time through words alone?

"When I was offered the novelization, obviously I did the research, not only buying printed material but talking to people who were long familiar with Elektra to get their insights and opinions on her personality," explains the author, who has also penned the novelizations of films such as *Hellboy* and the first two installments in the *Speed* franchise.

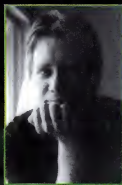
"Elektra was a bit of a challenge. While writing a novelization looks easy on the surface (turning a script into a book), it's actually more difficult than it seems. Scripts are of necessity short and action-oriented, generally emotionless. Sometimes the writer doesn't know whether a character is talking normally, being sarcastic, or screaming. The writer has to fill in emotions, facial expressions, costumes, weather, decorations, environment—everything."



Resa Nelson has sold about one hundred entertainment articles to eight print and Web magazines in the United States and England. A Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association member and a Clarion graduate, she also has published several short stories and novelettes in magazines and anthologies. Visit her website at [resanelson.com](http://resanelson.com).

# ENTERING THE MATRIX

Concrete Creator Paul Chadwick Further Cements  
His Storytelling Reputation by Daniel Wallace

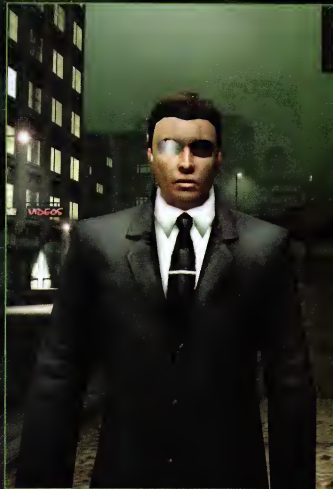


**T**his is the hardest damned storytelling I've ever tried," gripes Paul Chadwick, which is a complaint that sure sounds odd coming from a writer and artist who has bagged both Harvey and Eisner awards. Still, he has never before had to spin a tale in which his readers actually live inside the adventure. And where they are certain to have wildly different levels of involvement. And where they have the ability to influence the storyteller's story through their own actions.

That's the reality of *The Matrix Online*, a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game set in the *Matrix* universe. The game, which launches this month at [www.thematrixonline.com](http://www.thematrixonline.com), continues the story beyond the events of the movie trilogy. Chadwick, working in conjunction with the game designers and Larry and Andy Wachowski, the brothers who wrote and directed the *Matrix* motion pictures, has plotted out an overarching theme for the game's first year. It hasn't been simple, or linear, or easy.

"There's not much you can be sure absolutely every [player] learns, and there's no way to get folks to learn things at the very same time," says Chadwick, acknowledging the fact that *The Matrix Online* is a communal experience, lived by thousands of gamers simultaneously but all at their own paces. "So the tools of suspense are mostly denied us. But it's also the glory of this medium—total immersion."

Chadwick is a comic-book-industry icon. Having paid his dues in the 1980s at Marvel (working on the roller-disco-inspired heroine Dazzler), he then



started what would become his life's work—Concrete. Though he never achieved the breakthrough recognition of such contemporaries as Alan Moore (*The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*) or Frank Miller (*The Dark Knight Returns*, *Sin City*), Chadwick's stories of a man trapped in an indestructible alien body won gushing industry accolades and a slew of devoted fans. Other efforts from Chadwick have included the Jules Verne-meets-H.P. Lovecraft pulp thriller *The World Below* and a stint on Dark Horse's *Star Wars* comics, but Concrete has never been far from his mind. Currently available on comic-book racks is the long-gestating *Concrete: The Human Dilemma*, a six-issue series that entangles Chadwick's central character in politics, sex, babies, overpopulation, and a psychotic stalker.

After writing and illustrating several short stories dealing with the concepts and themes of *The Matrix* [see "The Matrix Comics" on page 32], Chadwick got the assignment as a storyteller and idea man for *The Matrix Online*. The world that he's helping to craft is one that will be instantly familiar to Matrix fans.

## Jacking In ...

The game begins one month after the conclusion of *The Matrix Revolutions*, the final chapter of the movie trilogy. The machines that control the virtual-reality Matrix have reached a cautious truce with the free humans who inhabit the true planet Earth—a postnuclear wasteland whose sole haven is the underground city of Zion. Though millions of people are still plugged into the Matrix fantasy, they are free to "jack out" if they choose—though this makes the machines nervous, since they rely on warm-blooded humans to act as energy batteries.

Adding to the tension is the presence of Exiles, rogue programs that have achieved sentience and complete freedom within the Matrix

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOU TAKE THE RED PILL

The Matrix Online is an MMORPG, or Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game, that thousands of people can play simultaneously while inhabiting the same virtual space. The genre was popularized by sword-and-sorcery products like *EverQuest*, but the very nature of the Matrix universe (in which humanity is jacked in to a single, shared-reality construct) makes it perhaps the most fitting MMORPG setting to date.

Award-winning developer Monolith Productions (*Tron 2.0*) is bringing *The Matrix Online* to life. The game won't feature any sweaty raves in Zion—the totality of the game will take place within the Matrix itself. For those who want to get literal about it, your character's physical body remains aboard a hovercraft floating at broadcast depth; but your character's virtual representation inside the Matrix—what the movies called a "residual self-image"—is controllable and completely customizable.

As a "redpill" who is aware of the Matrix's artificiality, you have limited control over your environment. In the game, you'll be able to make hyperjumps from the top of one building to another; use ability code to instantly gain new skills like computer hacking; bust a few heads using karate, aikido, or slo-mo "bullet time" gunplay; and select your own ultracool, Matrix-style wardrobe. (Say good-bye to those Zionite cable-knit sweaters!)

Monolith promises that combat will be intense, with over three hundred animations for each martial-arts and weapons style. Ability code can be created from scratch or exchanged among players like trading cards, allowing for maximum flexibility in character development.

## THE MATRIX COMICS

Beginning in 1999, the Wachowski brothers—who had developed many elements of *The Matrix* using the tools of comic-book iconography—brought the experience full circle by soliciting top comics creators to write and illustrate original stories set in the *Matrix* universe. You can read more than two dozen works from talents such as Geoff Darrow (Shodin Cowboy), Neil Gaiman (Sandman), and Peter Bagge (Mata) on [www.thematrix.com](http://www.thematrix.com), and many of the best stories have been reprinted in a bound volume, *The Matrix Comics*. So far, Paul Chadwick has contributed three tales.

"It seems a hamster's lifetime ago that Geoff Darrow called saying he was working on this movie with these guys I'd never heard of, who wanted comics for their website based on the world of the film," says Chadwick. His first script, "Dējà Vu," got a good reaction from the Wachowski brothers. Soon after finishing his third story, Chadwick was offered the opportunity to script *The Matrix Online*.

Concrete fans know that Chadwick is a master at using only a few pages to set up a bizarre premise or to twist an emotional knife, having honed his craft through years of telling small-focus stories in *Dark Horse Presents* (recently reprinted in the two-volume *Concrete: The Complete Short Stories*) and his *Twilight Zone*-esque recurring backup feature, "100 Horrors."

All three of Chadwick's *Matrix* tales are available online:

- "Dējà Vu": The eerie tale of husband and wife "bluepills" who, after a million-dollar stock tip and an averted earthquake disaster, realize they may have brushed too close to reality's unpleasant truth. If *The Matrix Reloaded* postulated that werewolves and vampires were rogue programs set loose among the normals, this story sets up psychics as humans who unconsciously realize that the *Matrix*'s tape loop keeps repeating itself.

- "Let It All Fall Down": A computer researcher uncovers evidence that machine overlords are pulling the strings of his world and flees with a female hacker "off the grid" to a wooded cabin that doesn't even appear on survey maps. Says Chadwick, "[The story] is pretty obviously a sympathetic reimagining of the Unabomber, who actually had some valid insights in his manifesto, though his murderous activities were a product of mental illness. Who more logical to fight a machine civilization?"

- "The Miller's Tale": "Give us this day our daily bread" is an expression not often heard in the human city of Zion, a subterranean cavern devoid of soil and sunlight. This story relates the struggles of one driven Zionite to bring this most basic of foods to his people. Chadwick's sense of naturalism is evident in scenes where bread is carefully prepared, and where frogs and ducks tranquilly reclaim patches of Earth's war-ravaged surface. The main

character in "The Miller's Tale" is inspired in his quixotic quest by Terrence Malick's 1978 film *Days of Heaven*. After writing the story, Chadwick learned that Malick and the Wachowski brothers are friends. "The Miller's Tale" may have gotten me the *Matrix Online* job," says Chadwick, noting that all three short stories form a pattern of character-driven tales that stretch different corners of the *Matrix* premise. "The Wachowskis felt I 'got it'."



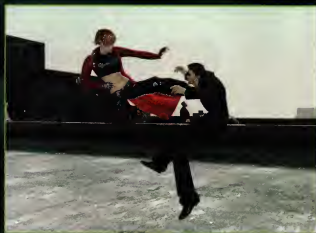
setting. As seen in the movies, Exiles are not cold automatons, but rather include all kinds of unique personalities. The Oracle appears as a benign, cookie-baking grandmother, while the Merovingian (a.k.a. the Frenchman) is a sinister wild card who delights in the pleasures of the (virtual) flesh. "The Exiles are like Greek gods," says Chadwick, "feuding and frolicking without any quality of good or evil. And woe to humans who get in their way."

However, that's not the only source of conflict. "Zion, lacking a common enemy, splits into factions," notes Chadwick. A quasisurrealistic movement starts. Assassinations occur. Suspensions grow. "So we have, basically, a messy peace that will not hold. Just how it falls apart, and when, is what's interesting about the game."

Chadwick's role as game scripter is particularly apt, since the entire *Matrix* universe was developed around a comic-book backbone. In order to sell the first movie to skeptical Warner Bros. executives, the Wachowski brothers hired comics artists such as Geoff Darrow (*Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot*) and Steve Skroce (*The Amazing Spider-Man*) to produce a series of storyboards that resembled comic-book panels. Typical Hollywood storyboards employ their own unique shorthand, with idiosyncrasies such as giant arrows to indicate character movement across the frame. The *Matrix* storyboards instead captured the kinetic energy of the movie that would bring "bullet time" and "wire-fu" into the pop-culture lexicon.

Chadwick, who has worked as a traditional storyboard artist himself on such films as *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*, *Strange Brew*, and *The Big Easy*, contends that the Wachowskis' distinctive approach saved the film from an eternity in development hell. "[Geoff] Darrow told me Warner bigwigs couldn't quite follow the script. No rap on them; I didn't truly understand it when I first read it before seeing the film.





But the storyboards convinced them that it would be exciting and cool. That's when the picture got the green light."

Distilling comic-book influences into a finished film worked for *The Matrix*, but will the same hold true for *The Matrix Online*? If anything, it should work better. Compared to playing video games, watching movies and television is a relatively passive way to consume symbolic language.

"TV focuses on the human face and spoken words," points out Chadwick. "It can be followed with minimal attention." Comics, on the other hand, rely on the heightened sensitivity of readers to visual imagery. A comic-book reader is essentially "reading pictures," lingering over carefully crafted visual representations that tell a chronological story. Comics are a manifestation of a true visual language, which Will Eisner's seminal *Comics and Sequential Art* (quoting the *Harvard Educational Review*) expands to encompass "pictures, maps, circuit diagrams, [and] musical notes."

Despite the hours gamers spend staring at a screen, gaming is far more like reading comics than passively watching television. Gaming requires players to interpret everything they see for clues regarding what to do next. As gaming evolves, its designers find themselves communicating through a new style of visual language.

## Game On!

Storytelling is central to *The Matrix Online*. Chadwick has always felt that even *Matrix* fans who are not fanatical gamers must find the game accessible. After all, he admits, "I'm one of them. I'm mostly interested in the story."

In order to advance a narrative that can be experienced by a thousand different people in a thousand different ways, the game

incorporates multiple checkpoints that ground the player in the larger sense of what's going on. "What makes the game seductive is the half-dozen ways the story comes at you," says Chadwick. Every few weeks players experience a short cinematic scene that illustrates events in the lives of the major *Matrix* movie characters. Players can accept missions from the various factions (Zion, the Machines, the Exiles, and others) to find artifacts, interrogate people, and deliver messages. Vending machines throughout the city sell *The Sentinel* newspaper (the name is an in-joke), which is written by "bluepill" inhabitants who don't understand the *Matrix*'s reality but may inadvertently reveal clues to players who can read between the lines. Even elaborate word puzzles can appear within the environment itself. "That sign you didn't see at the intersection last week? That's significant," says Chadwick. "If you read it along with the sign a block away, and the one two blocks away, and so on, [you can] get the whole message."

Employees of Monolith Productions, the company that developed the game, will also be playing as characters to pass on rumors and, if necessary, nudge players in the right direction should the experiment start to veer off the rails. Chadwick says the Wachowski brothers will also play the game incognito. "Our goal is to give the sense of seething activity, significance, and unfolding story everywhere," he adds.

Another factor contributing to the story will be websites established for each faction. The game designers will seed each site with material and also invite player contributions. Chadwick hopes to see essays, rants, poetry, reports of what people experienced in game play, and speculation on what's coming next, all written from the point of view of that particular faction. "This thing's going to be around for years, and a body of culture will grow up around it, I'm convinced," he says. "There will be documentaries and coffee-table books and memoirs and critiques of *The Matrix Online*. Contributing to that body will make you part of it."

Players may be part of a shared society, but just like in the movies, some characters will be presented with the opportunity to achieve greatness. "We do have [an overarching] plot. But there are major events for which one particular player, or a small group of players, will be pivotal," says Chadwick. "Be at the right place at the right time and meet the challenge, and you'll be a god in this little subculture."

But you've seen the *Matrix* trilogy. You know the final fate of Neo. Can you become as significant as Neo in *The Matrix Online*? And is that even important? "A glib answer would be, what could Christians ever find as significant as the story of Christ and his sacrifice?" notes Chadwick. "Well, cosmically, not much, but their own lives and the world they share with the rest of humanity are pretty significant to them."

It's that sense of shared-world humanity, not just the black leather and wraparound shades, that will hopefully resonate with the players who jack in to the *Matrix*. "The Wachowskis told me they wanted to, in this game, give *The Matrix* to its fans," says Chadwick. "It's not exactly being written by [the fans], but they will definitely shape it by how they respond to the story we offer them." **AS**



Daniel Wallace is the New York Times-bestselling writer of *Star Wars: The New Essential Guide to Characters* and author or coauthor of a dozen other genre books, including the *DC Comics Encyclopedia*. If given the choice, he would have taken the blue pill. Hey, virtual steak still tastes like steak.

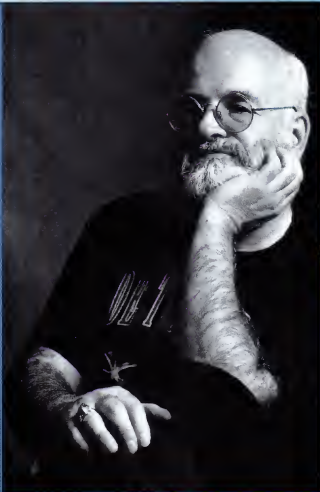


Photo © Robert Pennington

# TERRY PRATCHETT GOES POSTAL

## THE INDUSTRY'S LITTLE GIANT GROWS UP

by Will McDermott

**T**erry Pratchett is the consummate science-fiction-convention guest. Affable and quick-witted, he entertains crowds with ease. The audience devours every word, nodding at the simple truth in his comments and laughing at his nearly constant stream of asides. Listening to him speak is like reading a Discworld novel; one can almost hear Vimes's or the Patrician's voice with every dry, British comment.

He's also an author at ease with his fans, politely listening to one devotee drone on through an interminable anecdote while signing every book thrust at him with a grace and graciousness not generally seen in modern-day celebrities. Still, it's obvious he's uncomfortable with the adulation he regularly receives at such events. For example, although he was the esteemed guest of honor at Noreason Four—the sixty-second World Science Fiction Convention held last year in Boston—Pratchett was clearly uneasy about playing the role of honored guest. In fact, at the opening ceremonies he wore a self-deprecating T-shirt that read:

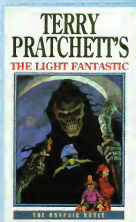
**Tolkien's Dead!**  
**J.K. Rowling said no.**  
**Philip Pullman couldn't make it.**  
**Hi. I'm Terry Pratchett.**

"It kind of amazes me that I'm here as the guest of honor," he said soon after those ceremonies, "because I'm not the kind of guy that I think guests of honor are."

It's an opinion he formed in 1965, when he attended his first World Science Fiction Convention, where Brian Aldiss was guest of honor and Arthur C. Clarke spoke at the banquet. Venerable Grand Masters of the field walked the halls, and the seventeen-year-old journalist with just one published story to his credit was awestruck. "When I was a kid, guests of honor were golden giants half a mile tall," Pratchett recalls. "Me and a guest of honor—I cannot fit [those ideas] into the same frame. I'm kind of dwarfed by the company."

What Pratchett also apparently can't perceive now is how today's young fans view him. During the weekend-long event, the author, adorned in his customary black shirt and pants, black leather vest, and floppy black hat, could often be found wandering through the convention course completely unfettered by autograph-hungry fans or even the customary aide assigned to guests of honor.

As a matter of fact, there seemed to be an almost impenetrable aura surrounding the man as he stared with bewildered modesty at the Mended Drum—the convention pub guarded by a seven-foot-tall Detritus—and walked past the dealers' room, where vendors sold everything from Discworld novels and illustrated guides to games, T-shirts, canvas bags, and art prints, all emblazoned with his creations.



Pratchett has written more than two dozen Discworld novels, which have spawned hundreds of spinoff products, including games, T-shirts, graphic novels, and mock postage stamps.

## GROWING UP REAL

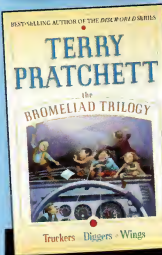
Despite selling tens of millions of copies of his thirty-three Discworld novels over the past twenty-two years—a feat that has earned Pratchett “an incredibly large amount of money”—this son of an auto mechanic still tries to keep everything in perspective. He even credits his father and grandfather with turning him on to reading. “They took the view that reading got you up and out of it,” he notes while discussing growing up in rural, post-World War II England. “Not to get Monty Python about things, but I lived in a house that didn’t even have [running] water. My dad would run a hose pipe to the house next door a couple of times a week and fill up a big cistern over the sink. This was just after the war and you were glad you had a house with a roof on it, so little details like electricity and water were kind of secondary.”

Pratchett was ten or eleven years old before he even saw his first TV. “That was great because I was old enough that it didn’t grab me around the throat,” he says. “You watched the kind of television you wanted to watch and then you didn’t watch anymore. Television never really got its claws into me. ... It was an age when there were still a lot of secondhand bookshops around.”

So the resourceful youngster turned to books for entertainment. “I [liked] most science-fiction authors,” remembers Pratchett. “Lots and lots of SF and lots and lots of everything else as well.” This early introduction to reading obviously had a major impact on his work. “The book that got me reading was *The Wind in the Willows*, which was a very weird book,” he continues. “I mean, consider the size of the badger, the mole, the rat, and the toad. The toad can drive a motor vehicle but can also get into a badger’s hole. There’s some curiously weird stuff going on.”

## LEARNING THE CRAFT

All that reading naturally led to writing and trips to conventions, and Pratchett is careful to credit some of his passion for prose to fans’ ever-present enthusiasm. “You must admit that fandom tends to encourage writing,” he says. “Built into the whole thing is that comparatively free and easy interchange between fans and writers. There’s the unspoken suggestion that maybe you can do it too. There isn’t an impossible gap between reader and



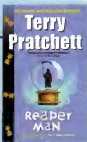
## WHERE ARE THE MOVIES?

With the success of the *Lord of the Rings* films and such British science-fiction comedies as *Red Dwarf*, and with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* finally heading to the big screen later this year, you would think that some filmmaker somewhere would be chomping at the bit to produce a Discworld movie.

You would, unfortunately, be wrong. While the BBC has produced two animated series based on Terry Pratchett's novels *Wyrd Sisters* and *Soul Music*, no other Pratchett novel has gotten past the script phase.

When asked about movies, the author gets a pained look in his eyes. “*Trucks* [an early, non-Discworld young-adult novel] is still alive at DreamWorks,” he answers, “[and] *Mort* is on the slab, but occasionally the corpse twitches.”

As for *Good Omens*—the apocalyptic comedy Pratchett cowrote with Neil Gaiman—that much-anticipated project has stalled yet again, with director Terry Gilliam (Brazil) now off the project. “Certainly the Samuelson brothers [the film’s producers] are now looking at other directors and have been talking to Neil, Lynette [Pratchett’s wife], and me,” says Pratchett. “It may well happen someday, but don’t hold your breath. Don’t cross your fingers.”



writer. So it was actually going to conventions and seeing these guys that kind of encouraged me in my desire to be a writer."

Nevertheless, after only three or four conventions and some early forays into fiction (Pratchett published his first story when he was thirteen and achieved his first sale at seventeen, just before the 1965 World Science Fiction Convention), the aspiring author made a practical decision. He became a journalist.

"I eschewed going to university, even if that would have been possible," he says with a laugh. "I was bright enough to know that the only way you could make a living from writing was likely to be journalism. You know, down and dirty, weekly-newspaper journalism."

According to Pratchett, the number of people in the 1960s making any kind of living from writing science fiction and fantasy in the United Kingdom could be numbered on the fingers of one hand. As a result, he reluctantly tabled his dream of walking with the giants for the prac-

ticality of a notebook, a pencil, and a regular paycheck.

Still, as anyone who has written for a newspaper can attest, it's a world where one sinks or swims based on an ability to produce copy on a regular basis. Young Pratchett learned his craft in the trenches—or, more accurately, on the benches—reporting on court cases.

"They put me in court," he remembers. "Okay, an older journalist gives me some hints on how to report court cases. But that's it. I'm in court. The right of the people to know what's going on in court is me. Me! Seventeen years old! I didn't earn any of it. I thought I'd better learn to be good at this stuff."

As a court reporter, Pratchett not only learned his craft, he also learned a lot about the power of the press, insights that helped him shape the character of William de Worde, the journalist in Pratchett's novel *The Truth*. "Shit, I'm seventeen," he says, recalling his own feelings from that time. "I've got no training in this apart from what the guys back at the office are telling me. They give me a notebook and a pencil and all this power."

Being a reporter also taught the youthful Pratchett to respect his readers. "There's a certain amount of complicity between the journalist and the readership," he explains. "You're writing for them, and they're reading your newspaper. They believe they have some stake in what you're writing, but you have to proceed with some care. You cannot shortchange the fans. You know you've got to develop as well, and you're not going to develop if you keep giving them what they are telling you they want."

This is a responsibility that, even after forty years, Pratchett still takes seriously.

## FROM JOURNALIST TO SATIRIST

Eventually, the young reporter returned to fiction. He published his first novel in 1971, a humorous fantasy tale titled *The Carpet People*. Terry Pratchett the journalist was about to transform into Terry Pratchett the satirist.

Pratchett's sense of humor, like his passion for writing, developed from reading. "I read a hell of a lot of the old humorists," he recalls.



### GOING POSTAL STAMPS

*The Cunning Artificer* ([artificer.co.uk](http://artificer.co.uk)) is an online emporium primarily devoted to hawking "cunning artificer" Bernard Pearson's incredible sculptures of such Discworld icons as Unseen University, Granny Weatherwax's cottage, the Treacle Mine Road Watch House, and the Mended Drum. But venture over to the website these days and you'll find some special, nonresin items crafted with the same care and attention that Pearson gives his sculptures: Discworld stamps, created to commemorate Terry Pratchett's most recent Discworld novel, *Going Postal*.

Pearson and Pratchett worked together while the author was writing *Going Postal* to create this series of unusual postage stamps. They consulted philatelists and print historians on the designs and worked with the Bath Postal Museum to get the world's last lineal perforator up and running in order to hand-perforate the sheets of stamps.

So now you can own your very own half-penny red, 2p purple, Morporkia blue, or penny Patrician stamps. And if you're really lucky you might even score a \$1 Tower of Art stamp or \$5 Blue Triangle stamp, which you can then place in your Stanley Howler Stamp Album (complete with a Discworld postal history written by Pratchett).

Just don't try to use these unusual souvenirs to actually send mail. You never know what the Ankh-Morpork postmaster will do with your letter.



From the ground up: Pratchett's first novel, *The Carpet People*, weaves an engaging tale about the adventures of tiny tribes living—where else!—in a carpet.





PLUS MORE!

"Mark Twain, Jerome K. Jerome [author of the classic *Three Men in a Boat*], and a whole slew of Englishmen you probably haven't heard of."

Pratchett also fondly recalls reading *Punch* magazine. "It wasn't particularly humorous, some of it," he says with a little laugh. "But some of the best writers in the United Kingdom in the early part of the twentieth century wrote for *Punch*." And the ever-unassuming author says he learned to write humor by reading the great writers who came before him. "It wasn't like I was looking over their shoulders as they made horseshoes or nails or something," he claims, "but I was reading what they wrote and working out—subconsciously, quite probably—how they did it."

Over the past few decades, Pratchett has honed both his writing and humor to a degree where many critics now regard him as one of the great satirists of our time. The original *Discworld* novel—*The Colour of Magic*—appeared twelve years after *The Carpet People*, and the author freely admits the latter book was written as a satire of the numerous clichés prevalent in fantasy. He views it as a "road movie."

The humor in these early *Discworld* novels was broad and pervasive—who can forget the scene of Ankh-Morpork burning because of the introduction of fire insurance!—and over the years the series has satirized everything from Shakespeare (*Wyrd Sisters*, *Lords and Ladies*) to the music business (*Soul Music*) and Hollywood (*Moving Pictures*).

However, over the past few years, many readers have felt the series is turning noticeably darker. *The Truth* is about how news manipulates politics, which in turn gets manipulated by politicians. *Monstrous Regiment* tells of the impact the atrocities of war have on a country and its people. While these certainly are topical subjects, they're also much more serious in tone and content. Which is why Pratchett compares *Monstrous Regiment* to the television series *M\*A\*S\*H*, where the humor arises from the desperate nature of the situation.

"A lot of people have said the series is getting darker," admits Pratchett, "but if it's nothing but gags, it's not funny. Actually, that's not bad. I'll say that again: if it's nothing but gags, it's not funny. ... You cannot have a novel set in wartime where people miraculously don't die. That is not going to work. The situation has to be desperate. You don't need too much of it, but you have to make it dire."

## ON BEING A GIANT

From fan to reporter to satirist, Pratchett has constantly strived to develop his abilities and entertain his audience. Yet even though his life's work is beloved by millions of fans and his best-selling books have made him a rich man, and the science-fiction and fantasy community has recognized him as guest of honor at the World Science Fiction Convention, he still does not see himself as a giant in the field.

"I'm a nice guy, and I write books that are popular, but being nice and being popular, I put it to you, is not sufficient," he firmly claims. "You should be good as well. There's still a part of me that says being clever is not the same as being good. If you are clever enough you can spin the image in the same way that a conjurer who's good enough can make you believe he is a magician. But it's all conjuring. I think for most of us it's all conjuring."

Maybe it is conjuring, but then again, perhaps it's just a matter of perspective. The modest Pratchett hasn't lost his point of view over the years. And, at least from Pratchett's perspective, for those fans who were quite obviously looking up to this golden giant as he walked the convention floor, they simply haven't found theirs yet. **AS**



Depending who you ask, Will McDermott is best known as the author of the *Magic: The Gathering* novels *Judgment* and *Moons of Mirrodin*, the former editor-in-chief of *The Duelist* and *TopDeck* magazines, or simply "Dad." Will has written short stories, strategy guides, d20 game material, and an interactive electronic book. He lives in Hamburg, New York, with his comely wife, three young ruffians, and one large, insane dog.



## THUD: THE GAME THAT CAME BEFORE THE BOOK

Terry Pratchett's next *Discworld* novel will be a hard-boiled murder novel titled *Thud*, which is also the name of the first *Discworld* board game. According to Pratchett, the game, which in the world of the novel is played by trolls and dwarves, is integral to the plot.

The product was a collaboration between Pratchett and British game designer Trevor Truran. In fact, the author wrote a "Brief History of *Thud*," which appears in the game's rules. It's an interesting strategy game played on an octagonal chessboard with gorgeous troll and dwarf playing pieces sculpted in resin by Bernard Pearson (see "Going Postal Stamps" on page 36).

Players alternate playing trolls and dwarves and basically try to bash each other off the board. "*Thud*—that was the noise he made as he hit the ground," says Pratchett when asked to explain the origin of the name. "That's a good Dashiell Hammett [*The Maltese Falcon*, *The Thin Man*] kind of intro."

It's also a fun little game, available at [thudgame.com](http://thudgame.com).

# BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

## SCI FI RELAUNCHES ... A CLASSIC



Executive Producer David Eick, Producer Harvey Frensd, and Executive Producer-Writer Ronald D. Moore

**R**ecently, when Richard Hatch was travelling to a Battlestar Galactica convention, a beautiful young woman graciously allowed him jump into line ahead of her at a busy airport-security checkpoint.

"I was blown away by her hospitality," recalls the still-handsome science-fiction idol, "and I thought, 'Do I know her?'" It was only after they reached their destination and the same car arrived to pick them both up that Hatch—the pretty-boy pilot Apollo from the fondly remembered 1978 TV series—figured it out. The drop-dead-gorgeous blond was Starbuck.

Not cigar-chomping Dirk Benedict—who originally played Apollo's famously womanizing wingman—but Katee Sackhoff, the "newly reimagined" Starbuck. She appears in the Sci Fi Channel's new take on the show, which premieres this month (following the well-received miniseries that first aired in December 2003). Hatch also appears in a continuing guest-starring role. But what the heck happened to Battlestar Galactica anyway? How come even Apollo doesn't recognize Starbuck anymore?

The original Battlestar Galactica aired on ABC for only a single season, riding the crest of the wave of popularity inspired by *Star Wars* and boasting an unprecedented budget: a reported one million dollars per episode (the bridge set alone cost \$850,000). Yet despite lasting for just twenty-four one-hour installments, the show still captures the imagination of hundreds of thousands of fans, who've had a hard time forgiving the many liberties the new series has taken with the original backstory—from the now-female Starbuck to humanlike Cylons to more subtle transgressions like a shift away from the original's biblical and ancient Egyptian undertones.

The new Battlestar Galactica doesn't just take liberties with the series' history: the entire dramatic structure has gotten a retrofit, as the show strives for what executive producer Ronald D. Moore describes as an ensemble drama more similar to *NYPD Blue* than *Star Trek*.

In Hatch's own estimation—and as someone who admittedly still holds out hope for a more faithful revival of the show in the future—the new series and the original might share the same name, but they're "two very different shows. You can't even compare them."

Not like that's stopped anyone.

### "A Good, Lucky Call"

Both Moore and coexecutive producer David Eick defend the changes, saying they've sought to avoid the traditional planet-of-the-week trap of much TV science fiction. When conceiving the show, Eick sought out Moore, a veteran of not just *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, but also *Roswell*, *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and the first two Next Gen movies, *Star Trek: Generations*

# ESTAR

# CTICA

## AND REIMAGINES ... TV TALE

by Paul Hughes



and *Star Trek: First Contact*.

"From the beginning, what struck me about Ron was that his imagination was much broader than perhaps those shows could accommodate," says Eick. "I thought, who better to bring to the new *Battlestar Galactica* than someone whose knowledge of *Star Trek* is so comprehensive that we can assuredly avoid those trappings at every turn, to go left every time they might go right? I feel it was a good, lucky call."

According to Eick, the two almost immediately agreed on defining touchstones for the new series. The Sci Fi version of *Battlestar Galactica* takes its aesthetic cues from movies like *Black Hawk Down* ("for its battle realism, naturalistic performances, and cinematography"), *2001: A Space Odyssey* ("for its extraordinarily authentic depiction of space travel, tools, gear, etc."), and *Blade Runner* ("for its deeply emotional approach to the genre and the Replicants' obvious parallels to our Cylons").

"The underlying theme of the original series embodies a timeless idea, which is that humankind can overcome any obstacle," Eick explains. "While the original series explored that idea in a very straightforward way, we hope the new series is embracing that same theme in a more complex, realistic way. Whereas the original series may have told a story about the good guys beating the bad guys, the new series might instead explore why the bad guys might have a valid point of view—or how the good guys may risk winning the battle but losing the war. Our goal is to maintain a level of ambiguity and realism in every story."

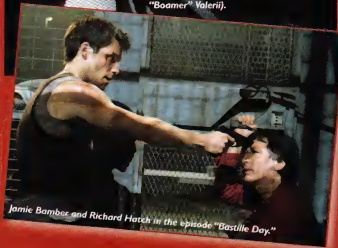
Still, despite the success of their partnership, the pair did not begin working together on the adventure for some time. In fact, as soon as the *Battlestar Galactica* miniseries got the green light, Moore left to work as an executive producer and showrunner for HBO's *Carnivale*, leaving Eick to toil largely alone in crafting their shared vision.

"Some months later, on a late Friday night in early summer 2002, a draft arrived on my doorstep," remembers Eick. "I spent the entire weekend poring over it, again and again, and in spite of the notes and changes I felt the script needed, I was on the whole absolutely blown away. Beyond happy. I knew we had it, I knew we'd make it. When Ron walked into my office the following Monday for our first notes meeting, I just hugged him. I think I may have frightened him."

Since that time, Moore has worked far more intimately with Eick on the show. He has been the originating writer-of-record on several of the series' thirteen episodes, and he also oversees continuity of voice and creative vision with significant rewrites on each of the other scripts. According to Eick, discussion is guaranteed to be lively whenever Moore and the other writers gather to share episode ideas.



Edward James Olmos (Commander Adama), Mary McDonnell (President Laura Roslin), Jamie Bamber (Lee "Apollo" Adama), Katee Sackhoff (Kara "Starbuck" Thrace), Tricia Helfer (Number Six), James Callis (Gaius Baltar), and Grace Park (Sharon "Boomer" Valerii).



Jamie Bamber and Richard Hatch in the episode "Bastille Day."

Photo © Frank Ockenfels III/Quincy



Katie Sackhoff as Kara "Starbuck" Thrace.



Katie Sackhoff with Tobias Mehler in the episode "Act of Contrition."



## THE BEST OF TIMES, THE WORST OF TIMES

Think of it as a doctoral thesis on *Battlestar Galactica*: In 1998, John Kenneth Muir wrote *An Analytical Guide to Television's "Battlestar Galactica"*, a critical, episode-by-episode review of the original series, and he remains one of the show's preeminent critics and fans. Here's his take on the best and worst

(many of the original series)

## BATTLESTAR'S THREE BEST "THE LIVING LEGEND"

(Original airdates: November 26 and December 3, 1978)

"When the *Galactica* encounters the battleship *Pegasus*, captained by legendary Commander Cain (the late Lloyd Bridges), the fireworks between the characters is matched only by the explosive combat with the Cylons. Think of it as *From Here to Eternity* in space, as the personal and war stories of our Colonial heroes mingle. Among the two-part tale's highlights: Baltar's delicious double take (from the cockpit of a Cylon Raider) as he realizes that his forces are now confronting two

battlestars."

"Our arguments tend to be more broad-based than episode specific," he notes. "For example, we might find ourselves having to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of telling a 'serialized' story, and how to balance the servicing of ongoing story arcs with the need to remain accessible to new viewers."

"Of course, each episode's story meeting sparks a new fuse, and a great idea for episode twelve might not have occurred without the umpteenth story meeting on episode six," continues Eick. "Because *Battlestar Galactica* uses multiple episodes to explore character arcs, plot lines are often informed by what stage in the arc a character might be at. However, we also reserve the right to say, 'Let's just do a World War II-style episode where Adama blows his stack and takes it to the Cylons!' Our show has the flexibility to accommodate that, too."

Eick adds that subsequent seasons could see these sorts of interwoven arcs getting more complex. "We definitely have a direction for the second season, where certain alliances between characters will shift dramatically, new characters will be introduced, and new powers will aggressively fill new vacuums," he says. "We might also discover that our villainess, Number Six, has an agenda for Baltar that will utterly shock the audience."

## "As the *Galactica* Turns"

Still, will fans of the original show who felt betrayed by the miniseries be happy? *Battlestar Galactica* scholar John Kenneth Muir, author of the exhaustive *An Analytical Guide to Television's "Battlestar Galactica"*, worries that the new series replaces the original's mythic scope with daytime TV triteness; a simplification that he disparagingly terms "As the *Galactica* Turns."

"Now [Colonel] Tigh is a drunk who is hated by Starbuck," he claims. "The relationship between Apollo and Starbuck—now female—seems to promise a sexual relationship instead of brotherhood, which is different, but not necessarily bad depending on how it is handled. And Apollo and Adama have 'issues' with each other. To me, this all smacks of soap-opera contrivance. Will Tigh pull it together, get off the booze, and save the ship? Will Apollo forgive Adama his trespasses? Will Starbuck be able to control her temper?"

According to Muir, one of the main grievances fans voice is the perceived gutting of the original series' mythic underpinnings. "The attack on the Colonies is a kind of reference to the Trojan Horse in Greek mythology, a surprise attack couched in an armistice that is meant to end a long war but is actually a trick," says the author. "And the twelve Colonies of Man are named after the twelve signs of the zodiac. Like the displaced

## "WAR OF THE GODS"

(Original airdates: January 14 and January 21, 1979)

"Apollo and Adama face the satanic Count Iblis, the most charismatic villain to ever grace the deck of a battleship. Before the two-part is over, Iblis nearly gets away with the murder of a beloved character, and a raft of new series mythology has been introduced—including the Ship of Lights, a race of cosmic angels, and Iblis himself (who may even be the ancient intelligence behind the Cylon Empire, the teleplay hints, since actor Patrick Macnee also voices the Imperious Leader). A riveting show with an amazing ending, and an installment that has proven a wellspring of creativity for the *Galactica* mythos."

## "LOST PLANET OF THE GODS"

(Original airdates: September 24 and October 1, 1978)

"This two-part story culminates with the death of Jane Seymour's beloved character, Serina. If you're not reaching for the tissues by the coda with Apollo and Boxey saying their good-byes to her, you're probably a Cylon sleeper agent like Number Six. This is an emotionally resonant show that takes Apollo from happy groom to widower in less than two hours and sets up a character arc that lasts throughout the season (with some punctuation in the series closer, "The Hand of God")."



Trojans, who were led by Aeneas, Adama leads the survivors of the Cylon massacre to found a new home—not Rome, but Earth. This mythology gave the series an interesting context beyond being another mere space adventure.”

Muir also cites the original's numerous biblical references, from the Hebrew roots of Adama's name to parallels between the parting of the Red Sea and the viper-powered mine clearing in the red Nova of Madagon. “Indeed, the original *Battlestar Galactica* series has sometimes been called ‘Battlestar Moses’ by critics because of these allusions to myth and religion,” says Muir. “But the new *Battlestar Galactica* dispenses totally with any such connections to our myth and history. Instead, it is tied to the realism of today's Hollywood and reflects only our modern political context. September 11 is now the metaphor for the Cylon sneak attack.”

Eick vehemently disagrees with that argument, seeing religion continuing to play a prominent, yet decidedly different, role in the new incarnation of the series. “Whereas our heroes—at least initially—are more concerned with the practical military-civilian leadership struggle... it's the Cylons who use religion as their primary motivation. However, as the first season evolves, viewers will see that religion, spirituality, and the idea of God play a very prominent—albeit very different—role for our heroes as well.”

The new show's focus on the struggle between the military and civilian leadership is more contemporary, too; Eick compares it to the more modern tension between the Pentagon and the State Department. This conflict gets played out primarily between Adama (portrayed by veteran actor Edward James Olmos of *Blade Runner*) and President Roslin (Mary McDonnell of *Independence Day* and *Donnie Darko*)—the former director of education and forty-fourth in line for the presidency, who's thrust into her leadership role in the wake of the Cylon attack.

“Whereas the original series focused a great deal on the Quorum of Twelve as something of a clerical body casting judgments and setting agendas, our show takes perhaps the more timely path of using the military-versus-civilian leadership struggle as a springboard for stories, which we see in our own culture every day,” explains Eick. “As in the real world, both sides ultimately want the same thing. However, their philosophical theories or tactical approaches might differ greatly. And indeed, the hawks and the doves don't always reside in the category we might expect them to.”

Eick also admits that current events can't help but have an impact on the show and its writers. “While it's impossible for storytelling in any medium to not somehow be impacted by the aftermath of September 11 or our country's current difficulties overseas, I don't feel that we make consciously overt or deliberate efforts to sensationalize these events,” he claims.

## BATTLESTAR'S THREE WORST “FIRE IN SPACE”

(Original airdate: December 17, 1978)

It's *The Towering Inferno*, *Galactica*-style, as flames threaten to consume the ship after a kamikaze attack on a landing bay. The vipers are modified to shoot a liquid called boratron to put out the flames, and disaster-movie clichés run rampant onboard. Adama undergoes open-heart surgery, Athena and Boomer are trapped in a rec room, and Muffit must crawl through a conveniently oversized vent shaft to save the day. Everything is neatly resolved when Apollo and Starbuck—wearing fifties-style holkid space helmets—blow a hole in the *Galactica*'s hull to require the fix.

## “MURDER ON THE RISING STAR”

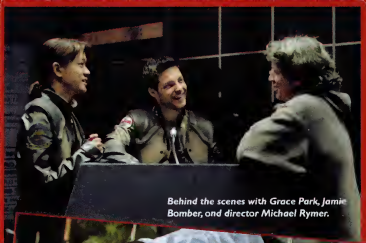
(Original airdate: February 18, 1979)

Starbuck gets accused of murder, and, for some reason, Apollo must serve as his defense attorney while Adama presides as judge at the trial. Even in space, you can hear the audience scream at the hackneyed Perry Mason-style touches dominating this episode. The most absurd moment comes when Adama solemnly notes that Apollo's defense gambit is “highly irregular”—a clichéd line that's been repeated on so many law shows for so many years that it should be outlawed. In fairness to *Galactica*, it's not the last show to trot out these predictable murder trials. *Star Trek: Voyager* was still putting beloved main characters on trial as the lone survivors.

## GALACTICA 1980— every episode but the final one, “The Return of Starbuck”

(Original airdates: January through April, 1980)

Aside from the last installment, which guest-starred Dirk Benedict as a marooned Starbuck, any episode of this rancid spin-off could easily qualify as the nadir of the *Galactica* universe. Among the (many) lowlights: A snotty teenage übergenius named Dr. Zee gets veto authority over Adama. Colonial warriors race around Earth on flying motorcycles, and a troop of high-jumping, invisible *Galactica* children masquerade as boy scouts. In one episode, they even compete in a baseball tournament.



Behind the scenes with Grace Park, Jamie Bamber, and director Michael Rymer.



Jamie Bamber in the episode “Colonial Day.”





"What these tragic occurrences have changed, however, is how stories are interpreted, how they might reverberate differently to an audience. For instance, a story about what one does when confronting the captured enemy resonates very differently after Abu Ghraib than before."

As for whether disgruntled fans of the original series will be won over, Eick remains unsure. "I have no idea to what extent our support in the science-fiction community has changed since the premiere of the miniseries, although I'm often struck by the gracious messages I've received from 'converts'—those who expected to hate the miniseries, found the opposite to be true, and are now avidly anticipating the ongoing series," he muses. "Ron and I intend to use the same approach to this issue as we have from the beginning, which is to listen to criticism, consider what makes sense, and ultimately make the show we feel satisfies our creative vision. Friends and foes of *Battlestar Galactica* alike would not be fairly served by any other approach."

## Apollo to Apollo

Nevertheless, fans of the original program will see at least one familiar face among the cast. In the first season of the new series, Richard Hatch plays Tom Zarek, a Nelson Mandela-like political prisoner accused of resorting to terrorism in order to challenge the government.

"He had the opportunity to get out of jail, but for his political beliefs—and because he believed in his people—he stayed in prison," Hatch explains. "When the great war took place, he and many others were left on the prison barge under very difficult, challenging conditions. He basically rebels against the fleet—rebels against the president and Adama—and challenges all of them."

When Hatch showed up in Vancouver to shoot his two episodes as Zarek, the kindness that he'd previously experienced at the airport continued. Katee Sackhoff actually took the actor by the hand and introduced him

Even before the new *Battlestar Galactica* came to the Sci Fi Channel, devotees had another outlet for keeping the story alive. Fans can follow the original crew from the 1978 TV show twenty-five years into the future through seven books ... and counting. How canonical is this literary series? Every installment is coauthored by Richard Hatch—and if anyone knows what Apollo's up to, he's certainly the man with the inside story.



### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: ARMAGEDDON (1997)

By Richard Hatch and Christopher Golden  
The framework for Hatch's long-in-development *Battlestar Galactica: The Second Coming* project, *Armageddon* follows the original crew as they continue to flee the Cylon threat. Adama dies, a power struggle ensues, and an old enemy returns.



### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: WARHAWK (1998)

By Richard Hatch and Christopher Golden  
Has the crew of the *Galactica* finally found Earth? This is only the second book in the series, so don't count on it. Following a holomap found at an abandoned Cylon outpost, the Galacticians set course for a mysterious planet—in the process discovering the legendary Commander Cain and a race of alien warriors.



### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: RESURRECTION (2001)

By Richard Hatch and Sean Timmons  
Commander Cain challenges Apollo for leadership, and though Apollo wins the battle, he just might lose the war. Still following the Cylon holomap, the fleet stumbles into a trap and must use its new quantum-shift technology to escape. Where do they reappear? Back at the beginning: the planet Kobol.

to everyone on the set.

"From the moment I sat down, Mary McDonnell and everybody kind of reached over and shook my hand," he remembers. "Everybody was more friendly. And then afterwards, the person I thought might be more hostile or more adversarial because I had played the original Apollo, Jamie Bamber, came over to me and was so congenial and friendly. He said, 'Thank you for coming. I love you on the original show, and I'm so happy you're here.'"

With the help of this warm welcome, Hatch was able to look at the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* not as a betrayal of the original but rather as a whole new "creative family." "Nobody spent more time, energy, money—my own money, my credit card—to bring back *Battlestar Galactica* [before]," he says. "It was very painful when the studio decided not to do a continuation. ... But that wasn't Ron Moore's fault. It wasn't David Eick's fault. It wasn't Edward Olmos's fault. That was a decision made by executives.

"At the end of the day, *Battlestar Galactica* didn't belong to me," notes Hatch. "It belonged to the studio. And I really had to work through my resentment, my sadness, my disappointment, and be able to look at this new show again—not for what it isn't, but for what it is, to see what's of value in that new show. And then I was able to appreciate the writing, the actors, the crew—everything that they were doing there. Like I said, I look at it as a totally different show, as its own entity with its own personality. I can appreciate it for that, and I think it has tremendous potential." **AS**



Paul Hughes has served aboard the industrial ship *Celestra* for many yahrens. Prior to the attack on Caprica, his work appeared in newspapers, magazines, and websites. He hopes to one day find Earth.



#### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: REBELLION (2002)

By Richard Hatch and Alan Rodgers  
Low on supplies and weak from battle, the fleet faces strife from within. On top of that, the stardrives won't work, planetary search parties have gone missing, Apollo and Athena end up in the brig, and Cassiopeia says she's pregnant with Apollo's baby. Oh, and if they don't get out of this pocket of null-space, it will implode and kill them all.



#### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: PARADIS (2003)

By Richard Hatch and Brad Linaweaver  
Paradise found? Again, probably not. It's only the fifth book! Following a map imprinted on Apollo's mind, the fleet journeys to the inviting planet of Gemon—which seems wonderful, until the treacherous Baltar starts having nightmares about a new race of super-Cylons.



#### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: DESTINY (2004)

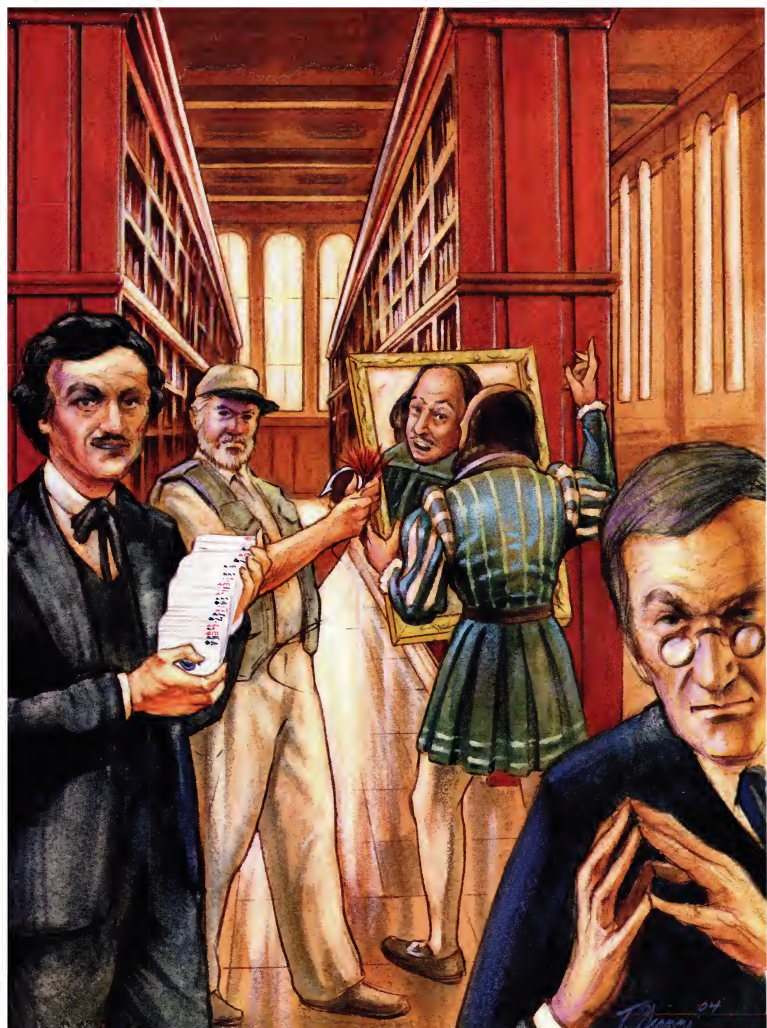
By Richard Hatch and Brad Linaweaver  
Our heroes must escape a system before the sun collapses, incinerating all planetary life. Unfortunately, the even more ragtag, by-now-extremely-fugitive fleet can only take two-thirds of the population. Who gets the shaft? Starbuck and Apollo, among others, by lottery.



#### BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: REDEMPTION (2005)

By Richard Hatch and Brad Linaweaver  
After the life-and-death lottery on Paradis, the crippled fleet flies under the leadership of Athena and Tigh, while Baltar makes a sacrifice to destroy the most terrifying Cylon force in history. Meanwhile, a thirteenth Tribe Ark offers hope for Apollo and the other left-behind survivors.







# AUTHORWERX

by Greg van Eekhout  
illustrated by Thomas Gianni

I was only there to steal ideas.

The place was done up cozy and old-fashioned—floor-to-ceiling shelves of dark cherry, ladders on brass rails, and busts of famous authors I'd never heard of perched on glass display cases. I wandered the narrow aisles, occasionally pulling volumes from the shelves to see if they were real. Turned out they were. Authorwerx had spent some bank on decor.

"May I be of assistance?"

I turned to see a tweedy little guy with a pair of tortoiseshell glasses pinching his nose.

"I'm not sure what I'm looking for, really. It's my first time in a shop like this."

He steeped his fingers and looked merry. "A tour, then? To acquaint yourself with our services?"

I tried not to smile too widely. "Why, that would be simply beanie."

He took me into a room with big leather club chairs and dark oak paneling. Framed antique maps hung on the walls beside smoke-darkened paintings of hounds and ducks. A bunch of shabby geezers sat around the room munching little finger sandwiches and drinking various brown drinks from cut-glass tumblers. They all seemed mildly startled, as if awoken from a nap, when the bookseller and I entered. This was Authorwerx's showroom, the bookworm's equivalent of the locker room my company used.

"The first five minutes are free in order to help you make your selection," said the bookseller. "Just walk up to any one of them and start a conversation."

"And after the first five!" I was hoping to get a quick summary of their pricing plan.

The bookseller pursed his lips and smiled. "Well, sir, that depends on precisely what you want." It sounded sort of dirty the way he said it.

I didn't recognize any of the units, except Shakespeare, who was staring into a mirror. He kept muttering the same few lines over and over, rehearsing, but his accent was funny and I couldn't understand what he was saying.

Off in a corner, a barrel-chested man in a fishing vest worked at hand-tying a fly. "The real reason for not committing suicide," the fisherman said to nobody in particular, "is that you always know how swell life gets again after the hell is over. Yep. Life is a dunghill. And I'm the cock that gets on it to crow."

At a small round table, a man in a roomy black suit shuffled a deck of cards. His head was big and lopsided, and his moustache drooped. The drink glass beside him was almost empty. I sat opposite him and said, "Hey."

"He speaks of death as though it were jest," said Lopsided, indicating the fisherman. "I tell you this: even to the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made."

"That's fun," I said, but I don't think he heard me, as he had gone into a rather breathless speech about loss and decay and he was overall a bit wobbly.

I read him as he talked. My nasals sucked in chemical signatures and sent the data to my oculars, which were also busy taking in EM bleed

and spectroscopies. At first analysis Lopsided wasn't much special: a Smart-E-AI housed in a fleshweave organech body. A decent unit, but not superior to anything my company offered.

I will admit that he smelled better than our guys. The antinecrotics that keep organechs fresh always give off a weird butterscotch odor, but this one just smelled like a regular guy. A guy who'd been drinking and playing cards all night long, granted.

I noticed all the writers were drinking and wondered if that was what masked the butterscotch. Not a tactic that would work for my company, unfortunately, except maybe with our Mickey Mantle.

The organech stopped shuffling the deck, and when he did, his hands shook a little. "Perhaps you'd like to hear a story?"

"No, thanks," I said to him. And then to the bookseller: "But there is a writer I might be interested in if you've got him in stock. He's fairly obscure."

Obscurity is what separates the men from the kittens in the encounter-entertainment business. Consider my company's corner of it. Any shop can deal to a customer who comes in off the street wanting to take a few catches from Joe Montana, or maybe go a few rounds with Ali. (The boxers always come in full of big talk, but in the end

"There were these buildings in the background," I went on. "Skyscrapers, only they were carved out of giant vegetables, and in the windows you could see little pairs of glowing blue eyes."

"That would be Windows to the Eaten World," said the bookseller, "by Nathan P. Horn."

Okay, now I was a little impressed. I blinked hard to activate my nasals and oculars to see what the bookseller was made of, and he read as standard human. "Horn. Yeah, that's the guy. Do you have him in stock?"

The bookseller's smile held the tiniest edge. "Of course, sir. This is Authorwerx."

...

Arrangements were made for me to meet Nathan P. Horn in an on-premises motel-room set, the sort of place where they probably staged encounters with writers of noir detective stories and neogothics. It was perfect for a Horn story, too.

The wallpaper was sea-green with black vine-work. A portable Olivetti typewriter rested on a desk, and on the floor beside it was a wastepaper basket filled with crumpled paper balls. I picked one up and unrolled it, then read the smudgy type: *Day Five. Astrologer Third Class Willford thinks I'm his mother. I'm worried about the outcome of the mission. The scene didn't end well for anyone concerned.*

This whole business with the typewriter and the discarded pages was a nice touch of authenticity. I thought. I checked out the rest of the room: pea-green sofa and matching armchair, a television set on a bureau across from the couch, a few spotty paintings on the walls that probably concealed the environmental. There was no honor-bar or refrigerator in the room, but a thoughtful somebody had left a six-pack of beer on the nightstand. I liberated one from its plastic ring and examined it. Aluminum can, room temperature, with no keep-cold strip. Very authentic.

A toilet flushed and Nathan P. Horn came out of the bathroom. He zipped up his fly and greeted me by grabbing the beer can from my hands, returning to the bathroom and pouring the liquid down the toilet. Glug-glug went my beer. "You don't want to drink that," he said.

I went over and leaned against the bathroom doorway. "Why not?"

"Was that your beer? Did you bring it here yourself? Do you know where it came from?" He was a pale man with sharp cheekbones and a roughly trimmed gray goatee. In a rumpled blue blazer, untucked shirt, and ascot printed with little kanji characters, he looked like a college professor who'd spent the night under police lights.

"It was there when I got here," I said, pointing to the now-empty beer can in his hand.

He looked at me a moment, then shrugged. "Well, so much for you. Are you wearing implants?"

I had just been about to activate my nasals and oculars. "No."

He moved past me and went to the window. "I used to have a dog that could sniff implants. He'd run in circles, yapping every time he smelled bugs. Died of exhaustion, poor thing."

A pleasurable wave of recognition went through me. "Miniature poodle," I said. "His name was Arky-Barky."

Gripping the window casing, Horn tensed up. "How did you know that?"

"I read that story," I said. "'The Sniff.'"

He faced me, taking me in. After a moment, his shoulders relaxed. "I can't believe I actually put that in a story. That was my downfall. Always had to be the whistle-blower. Always had to point out where they'd left the seams showing." He ran his hand through his hair and barked a laugh. "For Christ's sake, I put my name on those stories."

*I glared at him, and he glared at me, and I thought, not for the first time, that organechs should have a conveniently accessible shutoff switch.*

they usually choose to go up against the old, fat, punch-drunk version.) But let's say a customer wants to play some one-on-one against, oh, Marabuk Hartley.

Who the fuck is Marabuk Hartley?

Exactly.

Marabuk Hartley played power forward with the Celtics for five seasons before blowing out both his knees. He never won a championship, never made the All-Star game, and nobody ever saw his face on a cereal box. But my company has a Marabuk Hartley.

"To tell you the truth," I said, "I don't read much. But there was this one writer my tenth-grade English teacher gave us. Sort of a paranoid guy, you know. Way out there."

The bookseller remained a model of patience. "And who would that be?"

I scratched my chin. "I don't remember his name. But he was, you know..." I did something with my hands to indicate way out there.

"Perhaps you remember a title of one of his works?" the bookseller said, hopefully.

"No, but I remember one of the covers. It was a guy's head in profile. He was orange. Not like he had orange skin, but as if the whole world was orange, so he was orange too." The bookseller nodded encouragement. I was actually having a lot of fun being a deliberate pain in the ass.

I nodded. At my company we called this phase the warm-up. This is where you'd probably ask Jordan to talk about the last shot he took to win the '98 championship, or maybe where Babe Ruth told you a dirty joke. The customers enjoyed it, and it also served a practical purpose. It let the product get a feel for you, get a sense for what you wanted, for the context of the encounter. It made everything seem less programmed.

I planted myself on the couch and left Horn standing at the window. "You know, you're the first writer I ever got," I said. "My tenth-grade English teacher decrypted a bunch of your books and gave me copies. I read them all. I just sort of went nuts that year and read them all."

Horn's lips formed a thin smile. "If you ever see your teacher again," Horn said, "do thank him for violating my copyrights, won't you? My books were already cheap as Mexican gum."

I pressed on. "I've probably read everything you ever wrote. All the novels, all the short stories, even the stuff you published under other names."

Horn took a seat in the chair opposite me. He crossed his legs and scratched his beard, studying me as though I were a chessboard. "Did you read the detective stories I published as Victor C. Meunier?"

I ticked off titles: "*The Yellow Lady, The Blue Lady, The White Lady, Lady Red.*"

He frowned. "My work as Cody Hawke?"

"The Westerns in *Tales of the Badlands Monthly*. I actually own paper copies of those. But they weren't really Westerns, were they? They were time-travel stories if you knew to look for the clues."

If Horn was impressed with my insight, he didn't show it. "What about the Maxwell Trigg books?"

Those were men's adventure, and not very good, but I didn't tell Horn that. "The Butcher Brigade series. I read all of those. I read books eighteen and twenty-one twice. Each. But it's really your sci-fi stuff I liked best."

He leaned back in his chair and sighed. "You stand alone there, partner. Those weren't even popular with the science-fiction fans. They wanted sweeping tales of galactic empires or stories about rugged heroes with math skills. Nobody ever quite knew what to make of my stuff." There was no anger in his voice, just disappointment. That, and deep, soul-sagging fatigue. I could picture a younger version of Horn in a room like this, late at night, the neon liquor sign outside the window bathing his manuscript red. Typing a message in a bottle. Throwing it out to sea. Knowing it would never reach shore.

I'd never wanted to be a writer—writers eat ketchup sandwiches, my dad always said—but if you can get through your life without shaking hands with futility, then pat yourself on the fanny and count yourself one lucky stick.

I considered yawning, then, to mask a hard-blink activation of my implants, but Horn continued to look at me with his slightly glassy eyes. So I just smelled him. Not using the nasals, but just a regular, unenhanced whiff.

He smelled like a lot of things—old sweat, onions, menthol. But not antineurotic butterscotch.

I launched into my next bit, which I'd rehearsed that morning on the tram. "What I liked about your stories is that I never knew where they were going. It'd start off as a World War II military adventure, but then it would wind up being about android worms from another dimension out to steal Earth's dirt. It's like other writers' stories are bridges: There's a beginning, there's an end, and it's a pretty straight shot through. It might be a long bridge, or curvy, maybe, so you can't quite see the ending coming. But the trip basically makes sense. Your stories were different, though. You always blew up your bridges halfway across, and you'd have to swim for the banks, and you'd end up on some rock with weird lizards."

On the verge of laughter, he looked at me. "You're kidding, right?"

I forged ahead with some stuff I hadn't rehearsed, even though I was embarrassed now. "It's like when you wake up in the morning and you think your day is about having bacon and eggs for breakfast, going to the post office, maybe getting a haircut. But then you find out your wife has cancer, so that's what your day was about all along, only you didn't know it yet."

Or you wake up, and you think your day is about scoping out the competition, and then you find yourself saying things that have been lying dormant in your head for fifteen years, and you start to hear a thickening in your own voice, and you wonder what the hell is wrong with you. Like that.

"Did your wife die of cancer?" he said.

I'd shot my mouth off too much. "No."

"What did she die of?"

"What makes you think she's dead?"

"Is she?"

I glared at him, and he glared at me, and I thought, not for the first time, that organimechs should have a conveniently accessible shutoff switch.

Darla was still alive. But she wasn't my wife anymore. She'd left me for some Finnish marketing fuck named Usko.

Horn got up and examined an oil painting on the wall. It was some blurry thing like they made us look at in school, a little guy in a sombrero with a donkey, and a fat guy next to him on a horse. The sky behind them was the color of a tangerine.

"My wife died of cancer," he said. "You wake up and your wife has cancer. Or you wake up and your wife's a robot spy. Either way, you're fucked. That's the point."

"And just because one thing can happen and the other can't," I said, nodding, "doesn't make your stories any less real."

Horn turned slowly. There was a dead look in his eyes. "You don't think your wife could be a robot?"

"Well, no, of course not," I sputtered. "But it's a great whatchamacallit. A metaphor."

"A metaphor is just a condom that keeps you from catching life," he said. "Ribbed for your pleasure."

But I was experiencing no pleasure. So far my little mission had been a bust. I'd been hoping to take something useful back to my bosses that would translate into increased sales. Truth was, I hadn't really been pulling my weight at the job. Too many meetings I'd just stumbled through. Too many times I'd answered a question with a blank stare. I blamed Darla.

Darla, and her reindeer-herding, funny-boot-wearing marketing asshole. She'd turned my life sideways.

I needed to do something to prove myself valuable to the company. To myself. If things didn't improve I'd be demoted. They'd send me down to the stockroom. Or the janitor's closet. Or, shudder, the fluid-recovery plant. The company had tacitly made it clear that they wouldn't trade my contract to another firm, no matter what. My parents had signed that damn thing when I was fourteen, the only way they could buy me a college education. On my end, I got a diploma and a guaranteed job with health and dental. And Bleacher Heaven got a servant for life.

Horn lowered himself onto the couch beside me. Then he cupped his hands to my ear and leaned in very close.

"Help me escape," he whispered.

His breath was hot in my ear. I pulled away from him.

With a wink, he pitched forward and fell to the floor. He jerked about in some kind of seizure and in a weird nasal voice said, "Malfunction! Undergoing malfunction! Please notify bookseller! Malfunction!"

It was the dumbest and least helpful error message I'd ever heard.

"Cut that out," I snapped.

"Notify bookseller at once," Horn said mechanically. "Organimech unit in danger of permanent damage."

"Give me a break and get off the floor. I know you're faking."

"Power overload! Danger!"

"Oh, for Christ's sake." I sat there for a few moments more, watching Horn thrash about before I stepped over him and went to the door. Outside the motel-room set was a long corridor with a drinking fountain at the end of the hall. "Hey," I shouted. "Bookseller! You've got a problem here."

After a moment, the bookseller appeared around the corner. "Do you require assistance, sir?"

I jerked a thumb toward the room behind me. "In there. Your organimech is pretending to be busted."

The bookseller frowned. I think he felt insulted.

"Take a look yourself."

He moved past me into the room, and there was a plastic impact sound, followed by a heavy thud.

Suspecting what had happened, I groaned and made myself go back into the room.

Yep. The bookseller lay facedown on the floor, arms at his sides, palms up. Beside his head was the radio from the nightstand, broken to bits. A scattering of transistors and plastic shards were sprinkled in the nap of the carpet.

reason, in this case, surprised me. "Um, so," I began, "you know you're not human?" It seemed a harsh and tactless thing to say aloud.

Horn looked at me without anger. "Of course I do. I'm programmed to be Nathan P. Horn. I'm not a character in a Nathan P. Horn story. And thank God. Those poor jerks were always crazy."

I nodded, and then gestured toward the bookseller. "We have to call medics."

"We will. But not from here. Not till we're away from the shop."

"Horn, you said it yourself. You can't leave. Step outside and you'll freeze up. Only Authorwerx will have the specific chemical key to relieve your paralysis."

Horn smiled a snotty, superior smile. He had a plan, of course, and I knew I would hate hearing it. He peeled back his scalp with a wet ripping noise, revealing the top of his mint-green skull. It was stamped with the Samisys Robotics logo.

Just as I suspected: Finnish knockoff.

"We're not taking my whole body," Horn said. "Just my brain."

"A brain without a body? You want to be a paperweight?"

"You could get me a new body. I know who you work for. The bookseller told me. Authorwerx runs facials on everyone who comes through the door, and when you turned up as an employee of Bleacher Heaven, the boss told me to give you a good encounter. Out of professional pride."

So far I hadn't found this encounter very impressive. "Why should I help you escape? I'd be guilty of theft. And industrial espionage. They'd make me a janitor. Or a fluid reclaimer." Panic crept into my voice at the very thought. Juice boys make minimum wage.

Horn stroked his goatee, very full of his criminal-masterrmind self. "If you leave me here," he said, "I'll tell everyone how you clocked the bookseller. How you tried to pry loose my brain. I mean, who else could have done it? Me? That would be crazy."

He had it all worked out. He could use the bookseller's own keys, right from his trouser pockets, to wipe the surveillance files clean. And then he told me how to remove the walnut-sized part of his brain that contained his memory and personality. The rest—the motor stuff—we'd leave behind.

"They'll come looking for you," I argued. "They'll know where to find both of us."

"Yeah, well, they want to go down that road," Horn said, "and we can start talking about how much Authorwerx has stolen from the Love Shack."

The damned plan would work. I'd walk away with more than intel. I'd walk away with product. A demonstrably more real product than my company offered. If nothing else, a product that didn't smell like butterscotch. And I knew it wouldn't make a bit of difference. I knew it couldn't compensate for my poor general job performance. I knew that. But Jesus, I had to try something.

I looked at Horn. I looked at the unconscious bookseller. "Authorwerx may have solved the butterscotch problem," I said. "But you guys don't know dick about entertainment."

...

The thing with stealing is, if you steal something and you don't get caught, you're lucky. If you steal something and you don't get caught, and other people make money off the thing you've stolen, you're a hero. But if you steal something and you don't get caught, but nobody can figure out how to make money from it, you're just a juice boy.

"Good morning, Marabuk," I say as I enter the locker room, my paper juice-boy coveralls rustling.

Sitting on the long bench before the row of lockers, Marabuk looks

he peeled back his scalp with a wet ripping noise, revealing the top of his mint-green skull. it was stamped with the samisys robotics logo.

Horn nonchalantly leaned on the television. "It had to be done," he said in an unconvincing soothing tone. "Your encounter was almost over. He'd have been coming to collect you soon."

I knelt down at the bookseller's side. "You can't just smash things into people's heads, you know. You can kill them doing that."

Horn's eyes widened. "Really? But ... but I just wanted to knock him out. I didn't want to hurt him."

"It's the knocking-out part that hurts them." The bookseller's pulse was strong in his throat. He moaned softly and moved his feet. "Who the hell programmed you anyway?"

Horn shrugged. He looked stricken.

"So now what?" I said. "You switch clothes with the bookseller and we just stroll out the front door? Never mind us, boys, just stepping out for a little lunch, back before you start missing us?"

Horn shook his head. "That wouldn't work. I've got an antitheft device buried in my torso. Even I don't know exactly where. If I leave the confines of the shop I'll become paralyzed." He swallowed hard.

Of course he would. We used neurolocks on our product, too.

And Horn shared something else with our product that for some



up at me. "Good morning. I want my amino pie."

I place a plastic bag containing Marabuk's breakfast on the bench. Coffee. Chocolate donuts. Two menthol cigarettes.

Frowning, Marabuk laces up his big, boatlike sneakers. The size of his own feet never ceases to disturb him. "Any encounters scheduled today?"

I break the news to him. No encounters today, just as there had been no encounters the day before, just as there would be no encounters tomorrow. Marabuk Hartley still has some basketball left in him, but as an encounter personality, he's pretty much finished. His patter unsettles our customers. He keeps trying to convince them that their headaches are caused by sentient parasites transmitted through mother's milk.

Things get screwed up. The old Marabuk's brain, altered and futzed, is sitting in a tennis player's body. The tennis player's personality is now inside a NASCAR racer. The NASCAR racer had gotten too close to a magfliter in the stockroom and needed a new brain anyway. I try to keep things balanced, using maintenance schedules to switch bodies and brains. Every brain's a person, kind of, and if you shut them off or don't give them a body, it's too much like killing. Mostly, though, I'm just screwing things up worse for everybody.

"So, no appointments today," Marabuk says, fishing a donut out of the bag. "What are we going to do then? I want my amino pie." And before I can open my mouth, he snaps, "And we're not talking about Darla. It's over. That bridge is all blown up. Swim or drown, buddy."

Easy for him to say. Darla came back to me. Darla left me. And came back to me. And left me. It's my fault. My ability to make her miserable has reached a professional level. She's living in Oxford now with an exotic-matter physicist, and every time I think I'm over her she sends me four pages of the most beautiful erotic poetry I've ever read.

It's hard to swim for it when you've got cement shoes dragging you down.

"I want my amino pie," Marabuk says. "I didn't break out of Authorhood just to be stuck here the rest of my life. Give me my amino pie."

Aminopyridine hydrochloride is the key ingredient in the antidote to the neuroplock that keeps our organimechs from walking free.

"Shut up and eat your donuts," I tell him.

...

The stockroom is a dry, cool chamber with tracks along the ceiling. The plastic bags that hang from the tracks contain bodies. It's sort of a cross between a morgue and a dry cleaner's.

With business sagging the way it is, we need to liquidate some stock. Tough times for the encounter-entertainment industry. Thanks to all those clean-air and -dirt laws, people are starting to go outside. One of the Tijuana sexhouses is willing to take four organimechs off our hands for pesos on the dollar, and I toy with the idea of shipping them Marabuk Hartley, just because he pisses me off. But they're not interested in seven-foot black guys when the flavor of the month in Tijuana is average-sized, middle-aged Caucasian males.

I lower four bodies onto a cart and roll them into the fluid-recovery plant. You have to be careful when you set the organimechs down on the slab because the poor darlings bruise easily until you drain them of fluid. I stick the hoses in their arms, start the drainers, and the air smells like butterscotch and rotting meat. The organimechs, three baseball players and a golfer, stir and murmur on the slab.

"Don't," the golfer moans. He looks at me. Right at me. "Don't."

I sip from my thermos and soon I smell like gin.

The organimechs stop moving after awhile, and when each has exhaled a long, thin, final breath, I shut down the drainers, remove the tubes, and wrap the bodies in plastic for shipping. The printer spits out labels for each unit with name, sport, team, position, serial number, height, and weight.

It's when I apply the label to the golfer and see how close his physical stats are to mine that I get a terrible idea.

"Can I confess something?"

"No," says Marabuk. He transfers items from his locker to a duffel bag, considering each tube sock and can of foot powder as if he were a surgeon examining his scalps.

"I'm scared shitless," I say, "but I'm looking forward. To the future, you know. I think it might be okay."

Marabuk shuts his locker with a bang. "The future's just a fantasyland we can't stop believing in."

Over in the stockroom, another organimech ought to be waking up about now. He'll follow an impulse that will take him to the bathroom mirror, and staring into it will trigger his new personality-initialization routine. He'll study his drying plastimold face, slowly realizing what he is, who he is, and, hopefully, accepting it. With a resigned sigh he'll don paper coveralls with the Bleacher Heaven logo printed across the back in baseball-style script. Shoulders hunched, head down, he'll stumble into the fluid-recovery plant and go about the work of draining bodies of their life and pumping new life into them. I wonder how long it'll take before he starts drinking.

I don't think anybody will be able to tell he's not me. The plastimold work is pretty good, and I don't have much of a personality left for anybody to scrutinize. Besides, nobody ever comes down to make small talk with a juice boy.

By the time the Tijuana sexhouse complains about being shorted one organimech golfer, I'll be long gone.

Marabuk zips his bag, a sound like a little scream. "You ready to go through with this?" he asks. "Don't want one of those amino-pie donuts first? Just for courage?"

"Don't need it." What I need is a positive balance in my bank account, a place to stay, a friend to depend on.

What I have instead is the company of a paranoid pulp writer in a seven-foot basketball player's body.

I open the backdoor. The rats ignore us as we walk down the alley. Marabuk steps carefully, as if through a minefield. And even when it's clear the neuroplock's been deactivated, he still looks poised for disaster.

God knows how he'll survive out here.

God knows how anyone does.

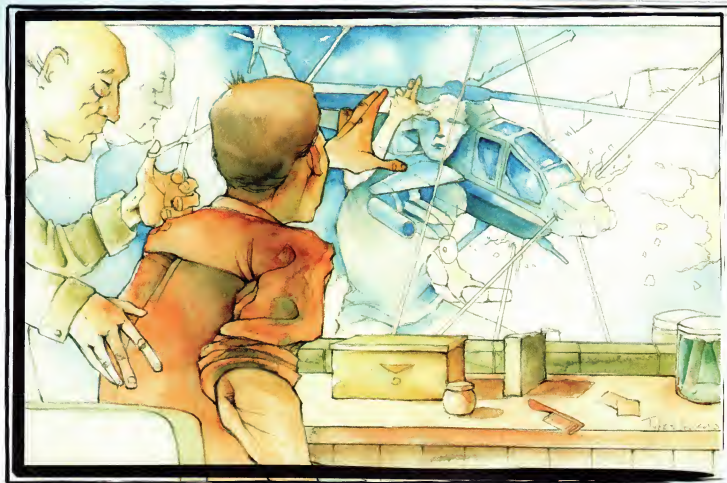
But everyone should at least have a chance to swim for the rocks where the weird lizards live. **IS**



Greg van Eekhout has worked as a multimedia developer, instructional designer, and college teacher. His stories have appeared in almost two dozen magazines and anthologies. He lives in Arizona.



Thomas Gianni was born and raised in Chicago. He majored in illustration and figure drawing at the American Academy of Art. His early influences were comic book and fantasy artists, Jack Kirby (*The Fantastic Four*) and *The Incredible Hulk*. Steve Ditko (*The Amazing Spider-Man*) and Frank Frazetta. Gianni has spent a good part of the last twenty years teaching art at several colleges in Chicago including the American Academy of Art.



**"STEAGAL'S  
BARBER-  
SHOPPE  
AND SMOKE EMPORIUM"**

by Jay Bonansinga • illustrated by Tyler Jenkins

**D**avey Marsh was in such a state that day he could hardly remember how he got down to Steagal's, not to mention how he got home from the Middle East.

The barbershop was in a gentrified part of town, on a side street just off Taylor, sandwiched between a Korean dry cleaners and a foreign-auto-body shop. The front of the shop hadn't changed since Nixon was in office—a broken-down little candy-striped pole planted in concrete by the door, whiskered in weeds, a window covered with chipped black paint and sun-faded photos of Sears catalogue models with hairstyles that went out of vogue some time around the heyday of the hula hoop—styles such as the flattop, the brush cut, and the "Princeton."

Davey pulled his S-10 up to a parking meter right in front of the place—the vacant spot a miracle in itself—and yanked the stick into park. For the nearly two decades Davey Marsh had been getting his hair cut at Steagal's, he had never seen an open parking spot right in front of the place. But that's just the way the day had been going.

Like a waking dream.

Davey twisted off the ignition and climbed out of the pickup. He was a big kid, and he seemed to unfold himself to his full six-foot-four lank as he got out of the truck, arching his back and squinting up at the high blue sky. His blue chambray shirt was damp under the arms and sticking to his back. It was late summer in Chicago, and the afternoon was heating up, but it was nothing like Iraq heat. Nothing like that devil's furnace that pressed down on you and matted your field gear to your back and turned your sweat to glue. Davey loped up the cracked sidewalk to the glass entrance door.

A little bell jangled overhead as Davey entered Steagal's Barbershoppe and Smoke Emporium.

"Scorch of a day out there, ain't it?" came a voice from the cool shadows in the rear of the place. The air inside the barbershop was musky and fragrant with hair tonic blown around the old linoleum and plaster walls by squeaky, rotating ceiling fans. It was a smell that immediately wrenched Davey back to his childhood, and all those sticky visits for crewcuts and suckers. There was an old Naugahyde sofa on one wall strewn with well-thumbed men's magazines spanning the last few decades: *Gent*, *Oui*, *Modem Man*, *Club International*, and *Swank*.

What was he doing here?

"Yeah, it's pretty hot," he murmured, looking around and surveying the cluttered shop. Jesus, that little greasy display case was still there with the cheap cigars and stale European cigarettes. And the comic-book spinner was still over in the corner with the same old sixty-cent Marvel and DC titles: *The Flash* and *All-Star Squadron*, and that stupid *Star Raiders* book. The memories made Davey's stomach clench. You'd think the old man would get some new comics over the years.

"Hold the phone! Hold the goddamn phone!" The little troll in the powder-blue barber's tunic shuffled out of the shadows and approached, holding his broom, looking the tall young man up and down. Burdette Steagal had to be a hundred years old if he was a day, but Davey was damned if the old man didn't look the same as always. That pug-dog face and bald head shaped like a fat missile, those little sausage fingers that played scissors over the heads of neighborhood kids like Paganini. "I'll be a cross-eyed son of a bitch—is that Davey? Davey Marsh?!"

"How ya doin', Burdette," Davey said.

The little man set his broom against one of the swivel chairs and trundled over to the lanky kid. Davey tensed as the barber embraced him. It was like getting hugged by an ape. Davey could smell Brylcreem and a faint trace of BO on the barber.

"Your old man was in, few weeks ago, told me you were in the service," the barber said, holding Davey by the shoulders. The man's eyes glittered with emotion. "Told me you were over in the Middle East. Jesus. Jesus, look at ya."

"Yeah, well." Davey didn't know what to say, didn't know what the hell he was doing here.

"Come in for a cut, huh? For old time's sake?"

Davey shrugged and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror behind the chair. His narrow, gaunt face was topped with the regulation buzz cut of a seasoned jarhead. In civilian life, he wore his wavy blond hair long, in a ponytail, bound with a rubber band—perhaps as compensation for all those childhood buzz cuts. But now you could hardly tell he was blond. He could still feel the sand in those bristles.

"Not much to work with up there, huh?" the barber grinned.

"I guess not."

"Tell you what," Steagal said, waddling over to the closest chair, spinning it toward Davey, snapping a towel across the seat. "Let's see if we can't make you look a little more suave for them neighbor girls."

Davey shrugged again and sat down.

"So when did you get back?" the barber wanted to know, turning toward a glass canister filled with combs suspended in blue fluid. His portly little body moved with a dancer's grace. He flung the liquid

**H**ow was he  
going to  
explain what  
had happened to  
him that night—  
riding shotgun  
on that Apache  
attack chopper  
a hundred feet  
above the sand ...

from a comb, grabbed a pair of scissors, then whipped a black plastic protective gown around Davey to catch what little hair there was left. Then the fat man started lavishing attention on Davey's cranium. "What'd your ma think when she saw you?"

Davey listened to the snip-snip-snipping against his ears, which were red and hot with nervous tension. He wondered how to answer. He wondered how to explain what was going on inside him. How he had gone over there fresh out of basic at Fort Benning, all full of piss and righteous rage, wanting to get back at those goddamn zealots for 9/11. Davey Marsh—the guy they used to call Big Bird at Senn High School, the geek no girls would go out with because he was so gangly on the dance floor and wore braces until he was eighteen—making it all the way to technical sergeant, the youngest noncom in the Seventh Air Cav. But how in God's name was Davey going to explain that first firefight? How was he going to explain what had happened to him that night—riding shotgun on that Apache attack chopper a hundred feet above the sand, firing 30 mm tracers into cities boiling like cauldrons with antiaircraft fire?

"I haven't—haven't been home yet," Davey said finally.

"No kiddin'. Jeez." Snip-snip-snip.

"Thought I get cleaned up first. Get the stink off me."  
"I'm honored, kid. You comin' in here. Always said you were a special kid."

"Thanks, Burdy."

Snip-snip. "You see some action over there?"

Davey stared at himself in the mirror. He watched the glimmer of the scissors, the plump pink fingers flexing, the comb flicking and teasing at the bristles, and the strangest thing occurred to him: *There's no hair being cut. Is he just pretending? Is the fat man just humoring a shell-shocked kid, just snipping at the air around Davey's ears?*

"You don't gotta talk about it, you don't want to," the barber said.

"It's not that, it's just—"

"That's okay, kid."

"I just don't—"

"That's okay. Don't gotta say a word. Just gonna make you look real dapper, real suave. For the girls."

**I**t looked as though the barber was painting his scalp instead of trimming it, each little flick of the scissors dabbing a brushstroke of ginger-colored hair back onto his head instead of shearing it off.

"The girls, right." Davey closed his eyes, and saw the crackle of mortar fire streak across his vision, those same awful shooting stars that had been ruining his sleep. When he opened his eyes they were wet.

Snip-snip-snip-snip.

Minutes passed with neither man saying a word.

Davey could barely see his reflection in the mirror, could barely see the bizarre optical illusion materializing before him, obscured by his tears like shapes behind a rain-dappled pane of glass. It looked as though the barber was pointing his scalp instead of trimming it, each little flick of the scissors dabbing a brushstroke of ginger-colored hair back onto his head instead of shearing it off. It felt odd, too, like warm goose bumps spreading across his scalp. It wasn't an altogether unpleasant feeling either. Maybe the first pleasant sensation he had felt for months.

A tear tracked down Davey's face. "Girls," he murmured, his voice breaking. "Pilot I got shot down with was a girl. Can you believe that?"

Native American woman. Big fat gal, looked Hawaiian."

"Davey, look ... uh." The barber paused. "You don't gotta—"

"Chief Warrant Officer Irma Goode. You believe that? Old Irma. I can't believe the fire we went through. I mean, you coulda walked on top of it, it was so goddamn thick, like we had gone and stirred up a hornets' nest or something. It was—it was right outside of Basra, and they just opened up on us, the whole goddamn Republican Guard. I mean, they just hit us with everything they had. I saw two other Apaches buy it, you know, right off the bat, and I was—I was—I was just like screaming and shaking and laying down suppression fire, and aw, Jesus, it was bad. I wasn't ready for it, you know? 57 mm flak chewing us all to hell, sparking and pingin' off our belly, those goddamn S-60s, like dragons on our ass, and we're—we're—we're ducking left and right, and breaking our pattern, trying to throw 'em off. And I'm shaking, right? Like I'm having a seizure. Firing every which way, and I'm flash-blind now, and I can barely see the Longbow blasting the leaves off trees and the sand off the rooftops, and we're like mayday now, I mean, we're like going in, we're going down. And we belly flopped in the sand, and it was like—it was like—an elephant landing on me but we didn't blow—thank Christ we didn't blow—cuz I got thrown—landed on my back in the sand but Irma—aw, Jesus—Irma bought it—I saw her face in the tracer flash her face—the flak took her face away—took it right off—sweet gal—Irma from Bakersfield, California ... had two kids ... one of 'em was a cheerleader. One of her kids was a cheerleader. You believe that shit?"

Davey laughed then. It sounded alien in his own ears, like the bark of a hyena.

He began to cry.

"Aw Jesus ... what good is it ... what good is it ... you see a good person like that get ... and you're just sitting there on your ass in the ... and the rotor's still spinnin' and kickin' up sand in your teeth and your ... and you're just sittin' there shaking and staring at some lady with a cheerleader daughter and no face ... face just gone ... just—"

The barber laid a hand on Davey's shoulder, and Davey clammed up. The silence crashed down on the barbershop. The fat man didn't say anything.

Another moment passed.

"It was a miracle those special-forces guys got to me," Davey said at last. "I mean, I don't even remember gettin' evac'd outta there ... but I guess I did ... cuz look at me now. Sittin' here sitting in this ... sitting in this barber chair."

"And thank God for that," Steagal said, returning to his work. The scissors continued snipping. Davey felt that humming sensation again.

"I'm sorry," Davey finally said.

"Don't be silly, kid."

"I don't know what—"

"Forget about it," the barber said, busily flicking the comb, pinching the scissors.

Davey glanced up at the mirror and his stomach seized up again. He was seeing things. And why not? They say you hallucinate when the strings finally come undone. God knew, he was due. He was due for a major breakdown. But who would have guessed it would come like that: watching scissors paint hair onto his head! Like a spatula frosting a cake, the gleaming metallic tips of those things kept extruding swath after swath of wavy golden curls along each contour of Davey's scalp. There were already a good couple of inches feathering down over his ears, fringing along his neckline. And that warm, buzzing sensation of honey dripping over his scalp was intensifying.

"Must seem like another world over there," the barber was murmuring.

"What?"

"Iraq—the Middle East. Must seem like a whole 'nother universe."

"Oh—yeah. I guess."



Snip-snip-snippet-snip.

"Funny thing is," the barber said, coaxing strands of blond locks down the young man's back. "It ain't really like that."

"What do you mean?"

"The world, the planet. You know. It ain't made up of different kinds of places—it's all one. We're all floating on the same boat, if you follow my meaning."

"The same boat."

"I'm tellin' ya, kid. I got the inside track on this thing."

"Um ..."

"What I'm saying is, I'll bet you a dollar to a donut they got a few of these dumps over there in Baghdad, Basra, whatever they call it."

"A few of these what?"

"Barbershops, for chrissake." The fat man was going like crazy at that point with the scissors and the comb, the razor tips spewing lovely cascades of flaxen waves down Davey Marsh's back. The hair shone in the mirror, lustrous locks of blond parted down the middle, almost as long as it had been in his 1999 graduation picture. And that electric warmth. It poured across his scalp and down the cords of his neck like a sympathetic note strummed on his nerve endings.

"It's like when you were just a little squirt," Steagal droned on with that weird enthusiasm glinting in his eyes. "Used to come in here and read them comics while you waited for your dad to get a shave. Used to sit for hours in the chair next to your old man, listening to the locals shoot the breeze, soaking everything up like a little sponge."

"Burdy, I don't—"

"Later, you know. You'd drop by. With all the hair, drove your dad crazy. Never wanted a cut in those days." The fat man chuckled so heartily his paunch shook under his tunic. "Never a haircut! Just dropped in to read some comics. Get away from it all, I guess. Take a little vacation from the world. You remember that?"

Davey glanced across the shop. That couch, that couch—that shopworn, imitation-leather couch with those rusty metal arms—it had to be older than Steagal. And yet. It sat there with that same spray of junky magazines across its ratty seat that had cluttered the thing when Davey was a kid. Wouldn't they have moldered and yellowed into powder by now? And that spinner rack with its chipped white lacquer compartments. It looked as though it had been pickled in time. And the comic books were mint originals. *Giant-Size X-Men #1*. The original *Conan the Barbarian*, with that gorgeous Barry Windsor-Smith art, for God's sake!

Davey looked at his reflection again.

"Oh no."

"Kid!"

"Oh no, no, oh no."

"Now they said this would happen," the barber muttered, gently folding the scissors closed. He was done. Davey's hair was completely restored to its original, heavy-metal, shoulder-length AC/DC glory. "It's nothin' to worry about. Okay! Just the initial shock of the thing."

"Oh my God," Davey looked down at the black plastic protective gown draped over him, his new, lustrous hair falling across his face. There were no tiny hairs on the plastic. Only a long metal zipper bisecting its middle. Davey had seen other soldiers—not many, thank God, but a few—cocooned in the same exact kind of plastic bag while being loaded onto C-130 Hercules transport planes.

"Take it easy, kid—"

Davey jerked forward with a start. He grasped the edges of the black plastic shroud and yanked it apart with a single spasm. The plastic tore in half, the zipper tumbling to the floor like a fillet of skin shed from a snake. Davey gazed down at his chest where the chambray shirt had buckled enough to expose skin.

"Oh God."

"Now don't be gettin' all riled up, kid." The barber placed a tender

hand on Davey's shoulder, steadying him, keeping him in the chair. "Like I said, it's just the initial shock of the thing. Happens to the best of us sooner or later. Just take a deep breath."

Davey stared at his chest. The entry wound was small. A tiny starburst between his nipples, crusty and black around the edges but fairly clean. Probably fired from one of those 5.56 mm carbines used by the Republican Guard in their foxholes on the outskirts of villages. "I never—I never—I never made it outta there," he panted, looking up at the chubby barber through tears. "Did I?"

Burdette Steagal just smiled then—that same crooked grin with which he always graced his customers at the end of a long dirty joke. "Like I said, kid. Just a place to get away. Relax. Shoot the bull for a while before movin' on."

Davey felt himself fall back into the spongy confines of the barber chair.

He started to say something else when Steagal suddenly called out, "Next!"

There was movement in the corner, and Davey swiveled in time to see Big Irma Goode rising from an armchair, setting down her magazine. She was smiling, her face restored to its olive-skinned, earnest beauty. Her hair was spikey-short but looked as though it would be a wondrous black mane if allowed to grow out a little bit.

Davey smiled through his tears.

"C'mon sweetheart," Steagal urged, grabbing another comb from its sapphire bath and turning toward an open seat. "We got two chairs. No waiting." **AS**



Photo courtesy of Jim Newberry

Bram Stoker Award finalist Jay Bonansinga has been called "one of the most imaginative writers of thrillers" by the *Chicago Tribune* and has seen his novels translated into ten different languages. Learn more at [www.jaybonansinga.com](http://www.jaybonansinga.com).



Photo courtesy of Michael Lipsett

Tyler Jenkins currently lives in Calgary where he is finishing his degree in Visual Communications at the Alberta College of Art and Design. When he's not in school he plays games, reads books, and plans for his wedding next August. He would however like to stress that he still has time left over if anybody else would like to pay him to draw pictures.



# A VAMPIRE AND A VAMPIRE HUNTER WALK INTO A BAR...

by Keith R.A. DeCandido  
illustrated by Tony Moseley

**A**bout time you arrived. I already got your drink."

"Red wine again? Do you never tire of that joke?"

"Apparently I do not."

"Is it at least a Chianti? I'd hate to have to choke down one of those American atrocities."

"Of course. Do you take me for a phillistine?"

"I take you for a Dutch lout with the taste of a pig."

"And you're an eastern-European dandy, but you don't hear me complaining."

"I've heard you do little else for the past several decades, my friend. And you have nobody to blame but yourself, you know."

"Myself? If you'd been kind enough to stay dead just once, then maybe I wouldn't have sought out that Gypsy woman for that immortality spell."

"I could have warned you about the Romany, you know."

"As if I was going to consult you about finding a way to hunt you down more efficiently. And as if I would have listened to your advice in any case."

"It would have saved you considerable amounts of grief. And we would not be where we are today."

"No, I would be in the ground, and you would be out draining some young lass of her life's blood."

"It is what I do."

"I should have sued that woman."

"Sue the Romany? You are aware, are you not, that they are not overburdened with material assets?"

"Yes, but think how much fun it would be to subpoena them."

"I will take your word for it."

"I'm being sued, you know."

"You are joking."

"No. Some American woman I foolishly agreed to train. One of your kind killed her family."

"Not another revenge-obsessed last survivor?"

"Yes, another. Really, if you people insist on wiping out an entire family, the least you could do is be efficient about it and kill all of them. This business of leaving behind youngsters with visions of revenge dancing in their heads does get out of hand. All they do is cause trouble."

"This particular girl is taking legal action against you?"

"Yes. Apparently I violated the terms of our agreement, whatever that means. She came to me begging for help, and because I did not transform her into a reasonable facsimile of that blond girl from television, she felt I did not perform my task adequately."

"The popular culture hasn't done either of us a favor, has it? It's been over seventy years, and I'm still living down that cape-wearing Hungarian drug addict."

"Well, you did wear a cape."

"Of course I wore a cape then! Everyone wore a cape then! I would hardly wear such an absurd anachronism now, yet everyone expresses shock because I'm not dressed in the same clothing I happened to be wearing in a previous century. I have always dressed at the height of current fashion."

"True. I understand suits of armor and bloody swords were all the rage in the fifteenth century."

"They were in the circles I ran in."

"Ran through, more like. Still, that Armani you've got on now looks good on you. I suppose it cost you someone else's arm and leg."

"At least I give some care to my appearance. Have you shaved at all since 1850?"

"What possible reason do I have to look good?"

"An excellent point. Why start now?"

"My line of work hardly requires it. Certainly not to the extent yours does. It's hard to convince beautiful young women to invite you into their boudoir if you look like—"

"An unshaven, slightly mad Dutchman with wild hair, battered clothing, and the lingering scent of week-old grime!"

"Touché."

"It should be pointed out, however, that I have not been able to enact such a scenario for some time. Gaining ingress to a lady's bedroom has gotten much more challenging with the advent of electronic security. It is difficult to mesmerize an alarm system."

"I hope you're not asking for sympathy."

"Quite the opposite—I view it as a challenge. I certainly get more joy out of that than the actual conquests. I find myself simply killing them more often than I do turning them. It hardly seems worth the time, given how tiresome they become."

"Oh?"

"We are creatures of the night. We are hunters, predators—killers. Yet vampires nowadays wish to loaf about and put their hands to their foreheads and bemoan how awful unlife is. It's revolting—they're so full of ... full of ..."

"Shit?"

"I was going to say 'angst,' but, yes, excrement fits the bill quite nicely. They have been given the gift of immortality, of power over others, and all they do is wonder about the meaning of existence and other such philosophical rot."

"Blame the literature. Or better yet, blame the Americans."

"Not that I disagree with the sentiment, but why them in particular?"

"Besides the fact that they produce the most egregious examples of the literature that propagates the very notions you're complaining about, the fact is that Americans think about things too much."

"I have been around since long before there was a United States, and I have never heard such a complaint."

"Of course not, because people don't pay attention. It's how your kind has survived so long, despite the efforts of people like me. But Americans, with their insistence on educating all their children rather than a chosen few, and their notions of universal literacy, have produced a race that does nothing but think. Most of them think only about the most foolish things, but they do think."

"That is a fascinating theory."

"Thank you."

"It is also utter rubbish. Nobody ever thinks. If they thought, they would go mad."

"Who says they have not?"

"An excellent point. Also my last. The sun will be up soon."

"So? This place is open twenty-four hours. It's not as if you're going

"... if you people insist on wiping out an entire family, the least you could do is be efficient about it and kill all of them."



to burst into flames."

"I still prefer to avoid the sun's gaze where possible. That, at least, is something for which I may thank the cinema. That German fool did our kind a great favor by perpetuating that burn-in-the-sun nonsense. Especially when dealing with your ilk. I do so love the looks on the would-be vampire hunters' faces when they expose us to the light and we don't catch fire. It's very amusing."

"You still needn't leave yet. You haven't even touched your wine."

"Nor will I. You have, as is your wont, put something in it that is inimical to my continued survival. As you always do."

"And you did not fall for it, as you never do."

"I do appreciate the irony, since I do not drink—wine."

"Indeed. Until tomorrow night?"

"Of course."

"Good-bye, my old enemy."

"Good-bye, my old friend." **AS**



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# THE by Benjamin Percy • illustrated by Ed Cox WOODS



**M**y father wanted to show me something, but he wouldn't say what. He only said for me to get my gun, my thirty-aught-six, and follow him. This happened just outside Bend, Oregon, where we lived in a ranch home surrounded by ten acres of woods. I was twelve at the time: old enough to shoot a gun, young enough to still fear the dark.

The moment we stepped off the porch, as if on cue, a sound rose from the forest, as slow as smoke. It sounded like a woman crying. I felt my veins constrict and a needle-jab of dread in my chest. "What's that?" I said. "What the hell is that?"

"Don't be a pantywaist," my father said over his shoulder. By now he was several steps ahead of me and moving across the lawn. "And don't say hell."

When he reached the place where the grass met the trees, he perceived I had not followed him, and turned. "Come on," he said.

There followed a moment of silence, where he motioned me forward with his hand and I clutched my rifle a little closer to my chest. Then the noise began again, sharper and louder now than before, reminding me of a file rasping across metal. Even my father cringed.

Once we entered the forest, the pines put a black color on things, and through their branches dropped a wet wind that carried with it the smell of the nearby mountains. It was that in-between time of day, not quite afternoon and not quite night, when the air begins to purple and thicken.

We walked for some time along a well-worn path, one of many that coiled through our property like snakes without end. Sometimes loud and sometimes soft, the screaming sound continued, like some siren signaling the end of the world. It overwhelmed my every thought and sensation so that I felt as if I were stuck in some box with only this horrible noise to keep me company. Everything seemed to tremble as it dragged its way through the air.

We hurried along as fast as we could, less out of wonder or sympathy, I began to suspect, than the urgent need to silence. I hated the noise—its mournful mixed-up music—as much as I feared it.

Then, between the trees, I saw the inky gleam of its eyes, and its huge ears drawn flat against its skull, and then I saw its body. Blood trails oozed along the cinnamon color of it.

"Man alive," my father said.

It was a four-prong mule deer and it was tangled in our barbed-wire fence, the barbed wire crisscrossing its body like fast handwriting. I remember the blood so clearly. It was the perfect shade of red. To this day I want a car—an old-time car, say a Mustang or one of those James Bond Aston Martins—the color of it.

The deer, bewildered, now let its head droop and took short nervous breaths before letting loose another wail, a high-pitched sound that lowered into a baritone moan, like pulling in a trombone. A purple tongue hung from its mouth. Its muscles jerked beneath its hide.

I stood behind a clump of rabbitbrush as if to guard myself from the animal. The bush smelled great. It smelled sugary. It smelled like the color yellow ought to smell. By concentrating on it so deeply, I removed myself from the forest and was thereby able to contain the tears crowding my eyes.

Then my father said, "I want you to kill it."

Just like that. Like killing was a knuckleball or a carburetor or how to tie a necktie.

To this day, some fifteen years later, when I lie in bed in a half dream, the deer sometimes emerges from the shadows, snapping its teeth, retreating back into shadow as quickly as it appeared. To this day, I dislike the woods, I dislike hunting. I dislike my father.

Which is why, when he called and invited me to join him camping and hunting in the Ochoco National Forest, I surprised myself by saying yes.

I wasn't the only one surprised. "You're sure?" he said.

"Sure I'm sure."

"Your character just thinks ... I just figured ..." His voice fell off a cliff here, uncharacteristically uncertain.

I tried to fill in the sentence for him in as diplomatic a way as possible. "Some guy-time would definitely be healthy."

"Exactly," he said, relieved, his voice rising to a manly pitch reserved for taverns and locker rooms. "We'll drink some beers and raise some hell!" Here he paused and cleared his throat, and his sober tone resumed. "I can't remember the last time we talked, you know. I mean, really talked."

He hit the nail on the head when he said that.



East of Bend, the uninhabited country begins as immediately as the ocean begins off the shore. This is the high desert. In a beat-up Bronco, my father and I drove through the sagebrush, the flat yellow dinginess interrupted by the occasional pumice or cinder quarry. Though it was October and though by night the temperature might drop into the forties, thick heat waves rose from the road, shrouding the distant Ochoco hills and making them appear unreal.

I was working in Portland as a software developer and my father was trying to figure out what this meant. For four years he hadn't bothered to ask about my work except to say, "How's work?"

In college, when I announced my decision to major in computer science, he told me flat out he didn't consider it an honest way to make money. He had not gone to college—"Didn't see the point," he said—and worked as a contractor, constructing the luxurious gated communities that continue to sprout up all over Bend, inhabited by retired Californians who moved there for the skiing and golf.

Now, for whatever reason—guilt or genuine curiosity or something else—he asked me in a loud voice, speaking over the noise of the radio and the engine, what exactly the Internet was, what exactly a computer did.

My father is a big man—with a beard and a keg-of-beer belly—a man who wouldn't look out of place in a truck commercial. What he doesn't understand, he normally labels worthless and sweeps aside with his fist and a few select words. Which is why, when I answered his questions and when I noticed his eyebrows coming closer and closer together in confusion, his knuckles growing whiter at the steering wheel, I decided to change the subject to one he would enjoy.

"How's Boo working out for you?" Boo was a lab-retriever mix he bought about a year ago from an alfalfa-farmer neighbor. He had always wanted a hunting dog and he had been training Boo obsessively.

"Oh, he's a good boy." My father smiled and adjusted the rearview mirror so he could spy on Boo where he slept in a horseshoe shape. "Boo?" he said. "Hey, Boo bear?" At the sound of his name, the dog perked his ears and lifted his head from his paws and thumped his tail a few times. "You ready to hunt, Boo?" my father said, and Boo barked sharply.

My father then began to explain at length how raising a dog is no different than raising a child. He claimed a man who fails to sufficiently and constantly train his dog, to test it, to discipline it—from its weaning to its death—is in for a rude awakening. "Boo was not even a month old when I



first introduced him to water, to various types of cover, and of course to game birds," he said and ran a hand across his beard, neatening it. "When it comes to dogs, you got to develop their obedience and hunting desire from the get-go or they won't grow up right."

Here he gave me a look full of judgment and love that quite frankly pissed me off in a lot of ways, but I pretended not to notice—I kept up my pleasant demeanor—because with him, when things boiled over, it took a lot of time and energy before he would treat you civilly again—and we had a long weekend ahead of us.

He explained how he first coaxed Boo into water. "I took my fly rod, see?" He pantomimed casting. "And with a pheasant wing dangling from it, I shot it off into the shallow part of the pond and let Boo chase it and sight-point it."

Then he baited Boo with a dead bird, and then a live lame bird. "At first, my pup got afraid when he felt the bottom disappear under his legs, but I got in the pond with him and showed him how safe it was, and now, by God, he can hardly go by a puddle without wanting to jump in it." I remembered him shoving me off a dock and demanding I tread water for sixty seconds and laughing much as he laughed now when looking lovingly at his dog.

I admit to feeling something like jealousy.

"No," he said, as if responding to some conversation I wasn't a part of, "Boo won't be much help to us deer hunting, but he's good company."

I continued to listen and he continued to speak until the final distance—where the sagebrush gave way to juniper and pine trees—became the near distance and the ground began to steadily rise and the evergreen forest filtered the sun into puddles that splashed across the highway. We turned off the air conditioner and rolled down our windows because here the heat was gone, replaced by a pure cool air that made breathing feel like drinking.



My father was a creature of habit, and for as long as my family had been visiting the Ochochos we made our camp along the south fork of the John Day River, in the Black Canyon wilderness. Besides the occasional Forest Service truck grumbling along the nearby logging road, we never saw anyone, and my father considered the spot his own.

To remember the exact location, he had blaze-marked a pine with his hatchet. "Keep an eye out," he said, and then, "There!" indicating the tree with the wound scabbed over with hard orange sap. We parked under its branches and tramped through the bear grass and lupine, seeking the cold spring that bled into the south fork, and next to it, our old fire pit, probably with a few weeds growing through its ashes.

We found something else entirely.

Boo ran ahead of us, popping his teeth at butterflies, barking at a chipmunk that chattered a warning from a nearby tree, and then his body went still. "You see that?" my father said, nodding in Boo's direction. "He's sighted something there. Maybe a ptarmigan or a grouse."

It was another thirty feet to where Boo pointed, his body as black and as rigid as obsidian, his snout indicating something hidden among the knee-high grass. "Ac ease," my father said, and the dog relaxed his pose and wagged his tail but kept his eyes focused ahead of him.

Here was the cold spring—the size of a hot tub—surrounded by willows and sun-sparkled stones, and next to it, our fire pit, and next to it, a body.

The man had been dead a long time. So long that I could only identify him as male by his clothes—his jeans and flannel shirt—and even then I could not be certain. The vultures and the coyotes and the flies and the worms had had their way with him. I imagined the coyotes howling when they did it, fighting over the juiciest pieces of meat.

After a stunned silence, I ran. I ran and probably made it fifty feet before I stopped and found my cool and steadied my breathing and returned to my father, slowly.

"This is bad," he said. My father was wearing a John Deere cap and he removed it now and put his hand into its hollow as if seeking an explanation there. "This is a hell of a thing." He looked like a man who has woken from a nap and cannot find his bearings.

I took my cell phone from my pocket. No surprise: there was no service here, far from any tower. "If we drive to the top of the canyon," I said, "if we get a little higher, I might be able to get a signal. It's worth a try anyway."

"No." My father put his hat back on and straightened it.

"Excuse me?"

"No," he said again. "What's the rush?" He lifted his hand and let it fall and slap his thigh. "I tell you something: he's in no rush."

I understood this completely and not at all. "Dad?" I said. "No."

There was concern on his face, but I genuinely believe this had more to do with having to abandon our campsite than with the dead man sprawled across it. He put a hand on my shoulder and squeezed just hard enough so I knew he meant business. "Justin," he said.

"What?"

"Look. It turned out to be a beautiful day, didn't it?" And he was right—it was—the kind of bright-blue day that bleached everything of its color. "How about let's enjoy it?" He regarded the dead man, and I noticed his cheek bulge, his tongue probing the side of his mouth. "Tomorrow we'll drive to John Day and tell the police. But not today."

Boo crept toward the dead man, his muscles tense, his body low, as if certain the blackened pile of bones and sinew would leap up at any moment and attack. When it didn't, his movements loosened and he began to pant happily and waded into the spring to drink.

"Okay, Justin?"

I looked at my feet—something I do when gathering my thoughts—and there discovered a weather-beaten pack of Marlboros, the cigarettes that could not kill the dead man quick enough. "Okay," I said in a voice I hardly recognized as my own. "Fine."

From faraway came the sound of a diesel horn, a logging truck rocketing along a distant highway, reminding me that no matter how much this felt like the middle of nowhere, it wasn't.



We made our camp twenty yards upstream from the dead man. While Boo splashed along the banks, chasing the silvery flashes of fish, I set to work digging a new fire pit and my father unloaded from the Bronco our rifles and fishing poles and cooler and duffel bags and his old army-issue canvas tent. It leaked and smelled like mothballs and mildew, and every night I had ever spent in it, I woke up swollen and sneezing.

That Christmas I had bought him a new tent from REI—one of those fancy waterproof,

windproof four-person deals with a lifetime guarantee and a screened-in moonroof.

"Dad?" I said, and he said, "What?"

"What happened to the new tent I bought you?"

"This has been a good tent for us." He patted it fondly. "I like this tent."

He did not look at me but set to work unfolding the canvas and planting the stakes.

"You've got to be kidding me." My voice went high and I tried to control it. "That tent cost me nearly three hundred fucking dollars and you're just going to let it rot in the attic?"

He finished hammering a stake into the ground and stood up and straightened his posture to accentuate his six-foot frame. Beneath his stare I felt as if I shrunk a good five inches, as if my chest hair and muscles receded—and I became seventeen all over again.

That was the year Mom and I bought him a bicycle for his birthday, an eighteen-speed Trek. "Boy," he had said when he ran his hands along it. "Wow." That night he stripped off every gear except the hardest and from then on rode it all up and down the country highways with this terrible grimace on his face.

A grimace similar to the one he wore now, eyeing me with a hand resting on his belly. "I didn't ask for the thing," he said, "and I didn't want it." He began to rub his belly as if to summon his anger from it like a genie. "And when are you going to learn that quality doesn't always come with a price tag? Just listen to you. You're as bad as a Californian."

Just then Boo came trotting over to us, grinning around a femur bone with a strip of denim sticking to it. My father said, "Release" and took the bone and stood there, holding it, staring at it, not knowing what to do. Boo wagged his whole body along with his tail, and my father looked at me. What he was feeling then, I didn't know. His emotion was masked from me, hidden behind his beard.

We plopped our lines in the south fork and came away with five rainbow trout, each the size of my forearm. We scaled and gutted them and threw their heads in the river. We fried them in a pan with a few strips of bacon. We ate and drank and sat in silence. The only sound was the rushing of the river and the occasional crack of a Coors can being opened. My father was like a still-life painting, his hand on Boo's head, motionless and watching the fire with a detached expression.

I wanted to shake him and hit him and hug him all at once. I wanted to get back in the Bronco and return the way we came. I considered sleeping on the bare ground, but the gathering clouds and the nearness of the dead man drove me inside the musty tent.

I woke to absolute darkness and the dull, even noise of rainfall. The entire world seemed to hiss. I clicked on my flashlight, revealing a tent that drooped and breathed around me with many damp spots dripping down upon and patterning my sleeping bag.

Have you ever noticed, when you lay your head to your pillow and listen—really listen—you can hear footsteps? This is your pulse, the veins in your ear swelling and constricting, slightly shifting against the cotton. I heard this now—a sort of undersound, beneath the rain—only my head was nowhere near my pillow. I had propped myself up on my elbow.

There it was. Or was I only imagining it? The rasping thud a foot makes in wet grass—one moment behind the tent, the next moment before it, circling.

Before I went to bed, as a sort of afterthought, I had tied shut the front flaps. Now they billowed open with the breeze, the breeze bearing the keen wet odor of rabbitbrush, a smell I will always associate with barbed-wire fences, with dying, with fear.

Perhaps the knot had come undone with the wind or perhaps my father had risen to pee. Outside, thousands of raindrops caught my flashlight's beam and brightened with it. I imagined something out there, rushing in—how easy it would be—its shape taking form as it moved from darkness into light.

My father released a violent snore. I spotlighted him with the flashlight, wanting to tell him shh. His fingers twitched like the legs of the dreaming dog he draped his arm over. His mouth formed silent words, his eyeballs shuddered beneath his eyelids, and I wondered what was going on in there, inside of him.

Morning, a sneezing fit woke me—and after I wiped the gunk from my eyes and pulled on my jeans, I discovered outside the dewy grass trampled down, and before the tent, a boot. Its leather was badly torn and discolored, as if it had passed through the digestive tract of a large animal. I stepped around it, keeping an eye on it, on my way to the fire pit. We had stored some wood in the tent with us and I kindled it now with newspaper. Then I boiled water for coffee.

The smell of grounds woke my father. He emerged from the tent in his white T-shirt and his once-white BVDs. He stretched and yawned dramatically and the noise brought Boo from the tent. Boo promptly picked up the boot with his teeth and presented it to my father as a cat would a dead mouse. "Goddamn it, Boo," my father said and picked up the boot and shook it at him. "Bad dog, Bad dog." Boo yipped once and cocked his head in confusion and my father examined the boot before hurling it into the river, saying, "Thing looks like a hay baler got it."

About last night, I mentioned nothing, asking instead if he wanted bacon.

We set off with our rifles strapped to our backs. The rain had left the world dewy with its afterbreath, and in the shady spots a light mist clung to the ground, coiling around our feet, soon to be burned away by the sun. We followed the south fork until we found a game trail bearing many hoofprints, rain-blurred but recent, and we pursued them up and up and up until we gained the rim of the canyon.

We paused here to get our breath. A small fire—no doubt triggered by lightning—had not long ago burned through this plateau, making the trees sharp and black at their tops like diseased fangs. When I leaned against a pine, its shadow stuck to me.

A basalt cornice jutted from the canyon wall and my father climbed out on it. Far below him, in the spots the sunlight had not yet warmed, vapors floated up and fingered the air. He coughed something from his lungs and spit it over the edge and followed its fall and laughed softly. He was so natural and fearless, standing casually at the edge of a hundred-foot drop, eating his trail mix and peering through his binoculars and cursing the big stags for hiding from him, the goddamned chickens.

Whereas I—with my freshly deodorized armpits and my hundred-dollar safari jacket with the Velcro compartments and all sorts of zippers and buttons and hooks for hanging knives and compasses—did not feel nearly so comfortable. Add to this the dead man wandering through my mind like a tumor, distracting me, and you have a hunter who hardly knew which end of the rifle to point away from his body.



The trail we followed, after crossing through a dense pine forest, dropped halfway down the canyon and ran into a willow and cottonwood thicket. Spring water made the ground marshy here. This, combined with the forty-degree angle, made me place every footstep carefully—though my father trudged along at a fast pace, unaware or unafraid of any danger. Birds called from an unseen place ahead of us and their music had something dark in it. They grew louder, croaking and cawing, and in a small bear-grass meadow we finally came upon them, nearly two dozen crows and magpies and buzzards.

Boo sight-pointed them and my father said, "At ease," and then, "Sic."

With one fluid motion Boo shot forward, barking fiercely. The small birds cawed their surprise and flapped up into the high branches, complaining down on us with their rusty voices. The buzzards remained—hissing, opening their wings—until the last moment, when Boo lunged at them, and then they rose above the treetops, where they wheeled in a tornado formation but did not depart. Something fell from one of their claws, a rag of gray flannel, and it fluttered between my father and me like a piece of ash.

We knew what it came from. We did not want to know, but we knew.

This dead man was fresher than the other, no more than a few days old. He lay splayed out in a sort of bloody X. I cannot tell you if he was blond or brown-haired, if he was fat or skinny, because I could not focus on the body for more than a second. I did not cry, nor did I run—but I closed my eyes and pressed my hands to them until fireworks played across my retinal screen.

I think my father said it best when he said, "All right. I'm officially creeped."

I took him by the sleeve and said, "Can we please, please, please go home now?"

"Yes," he said. "I think we'd better."



We were a few hundred yards upstream from our camp when it happened. Somewhere across the south fork there was a sound—a deep groan—and all three of us went still.

"Quiet!" my father said when I opened my mouth to speak. He had one hand cupped around his ear, while the other held his rifle. When, after a moment, we had heard nothing else, I said, "Do you think it's a bear?"

He did not have an answer, because right then Boo broke away from us and leapt into the river. It was fast-moving and foaming and pulled the dog a good thirty feet downstream before he made it across. Once there he shook off quickly and rushed the sandy bank and entered the woods, and then a moment later appeared again on the bank, barking terribly at something in the trees. "Boo," my father yelled. "Boo, goddamn it, get over here."

The dog did not acknowledge him but continued barking when he ran in a wide circle and then vanished into another section of underbrush.

For a long time, over the noise of the river, we could hear the branches snapping, the bushes rustling, Boo barking, and then a silence set in that in this deep, shadowed canyon seemed too silent.

Dust clung to the air and drifted across the river.

Some of it stuck to my skin. My father could not stop shaking his head. He could

not believe it. "I've never seen a dog act like that,"

he said.

"I've seen salmon act like that, when the hook first surprised them, but never a dog."



My father wanted to immediately ford the river and search for Boo, but I suggested to him, since we were so close already, that we might make our lunch at camp, and who knows, the smell of fried fish might bring the dog from the forest.

"Or something else," my father said, and when I said, "What?" he put two fingers to his mouth and whistled that special ear-zinging whistle I have always wished to master. When Boo did not respond he muttered, "Damn, damn, damn!" and began marching toward camp with his rifle held before him.

This past hour, clouds had piled up above us. They moved and met each other, closing the blue gulfs between them, like hands slowly weaving a spell of grayness over the day. The sun filtered through the thinner clouds and shapeless sections of light roamed across the canyon floor and walls.

We returned to find our camp not as we left it. The cooler was open, the lawn chairs were tipped over, and my sleeping bag had been dragged halfway from the tent like a stuck-out tongue.

"What the hell," I said as adrenaline-soaked panic hummed like Muzak in the background of my brain. "I mean, what the hell, Dad? What did this?" I knew this sounded like a line from a bad movie, and I wanted a line from a good movie, but there was nothing else to say. "Dad?"

My father picked up the sleeping bag and smelled it, clearly lost in thought. "Mmm."

"Mmm what?"

"Mmm I don't know. I don't want to talk about it."

"Let's go now," I said. "Can we just go now?"

My father pushed the sleeping bag back into the tent and went to the fire pit and squatted next to it and began to arrange fresh kindling. "Not without Boo, we won't."

"Look," I said. "We'll go to John Day and—"

"Not without Boo, we won't!" This was said at a scream. A freakish look came into his eyes that I didn't want to argue with, so I lifted my hands and let them fall as I sought an explanation and gave up on one all in the same motion. "We'll eat something," my father said, his voice calm now, "and then we're going to find him. We're going to track him. And if we run into anything else along the way, we'll kill it."

Soon flames crackled and trout fillets sizzled in butter and my brain felt as if the clouds had dropped down and seized it.



We waded the south fork with our rifles held above our heads. Once across, our boots squished and our pants clung to us uncomfortably and we entered the woods and the light fell away as if in a sudden dusk. Birds sailed around, squawking and inspecting us, but otherwise we saw no living thing when we followed the rain-gutted game trail bearing Boo's prints.

We climbed a steep grade and entered a wooded ravine with a stream trickling through it. It was a tight corridor—filled with shadows and jutting knobs of basalt and stunted juniper trees that somehow grew through the stone, their roots groping for purchase—and when we left this place and entered a wider gulch, it was with the relief of a deep breath and a loosened belt.

"That's queer," my father was walking ahead of me, and stopped, his body bent in half, searching the ground.

"Do you see it?"



I saw nothing.

"Boo's paw prints end here." He pointed to the trail. "He's running along at a good clip and then ..."

I had a natural explanation. "He left the trail and went into the woods." My father did not respond but kneeled and more carefully examined the rain-soaked soil, as easy for him to read as print on the page. "What is it now?" I said.

He raised his eyes from the trail and stared back at me steadily. "Boo's paw prints end," he said. "And something else takes them over."

I hunkered down next to him, and among the many hoof and paw shapes he indicated a long thin print—vaguely human—except at its tip, where three toes made a tiny constellation in the soil. I was not surprised. I was beyond surprise. I imagined I heard the ghost of a yelp still lingering in the air.

At a crashing in the trees very close to us we both raised our rifles. But nothing came out of the dimness except a mule deer—a six-point, a big, beautiful animal that ripped through the pines and over the fallen timber and into the open trail where it came to a stand, watching us, swishing its tail, not ten feet away—so close I could smell its musk.

I started down the length of my rifle. It felt cold in my hand. I imagined the deer tangled in barbed wire and considered firing, but didn't. I didn't have it in my heart—and apparently neither did my father. He sighed—as if to say, why bother?—and let his rifle fall and the movement sent the deer bounding up the trail and around the corner.

My father continued forward and I stopped him by beginning a series of broken sentences, but each thought lost its grip in the empty air. I became very aware of him staring at me. "Are you done?" he said and when I didn't say anything, he resumed tracking.

A chill wind blew suddenly through the gulch, making the pines send out a roaring whistle. Just as quickly, it stopped, as if the forest had taken a deep breath. There followed a tinkling noise, such as would come from a tiny bell, not too far ahead of us. We went to it.

The nylon collar hung from a tree branch, some ten feet above the trail, like a grotesque Christmas ornament. The tinkling came from its tags, knocked together by the wind. For a long time we stared at it, and then my father reached with his rifle and used the barrel to pull the collar from the branch. It was torn in places and its color, naturally red, was made redder by the blood that rubbed off on his hand when he held it.

A wince passed over his face and a flush followed it. I remembered his earlier comment about the hay baler. I remembered the dead men. I remembered my buddy Brandon—my buddy from high school—telling me the story of how one time, on a camping trip in the Deschutes National Forest, he woke up with something hunched over him—a black shape against the starlit sky—and he could feel its breath and he could see its unnaturally large eyes, and just when he was trying to decide whether to scream or go for his knife, it loped away with hardly a sound.

And I imagined someone, months from now, finding my jacket at the mouth of some cave, torn and spotted with blood. Maybe my bones would lie in a nearby pile, broken, with all the marrow sucked from them.

"No," my father said and twisted and squeezed the collar, as if to wring the blood from it. His face filled with lines of pain and a vein wormed across his forehead. A minute passed before he put the collar in his coat pocket and picked up his rifle, his finger curled around the trigger, his voice wild and fast when he said, "I'm going to ..."

But he didn't know what he was going to do.

I said, "Dad?" and he looked at me through a fog of shock and anger and fear and confusion, finally saying, "What leaves tracks like that, Justin? Not

a bear. Not a cougar. That's for goddamn certain. What leaves a collar of a dead dog dangling from a tree like some kind of message?"

My mind chugged through the possibilities, all of them involving horror-movie scenarios of long-armed humpbacked creatures covered in hair, and I began to feel very small and vulnerable on this dark game trail, a piece of meat among the shadowy trees.

"You don't want to say it," my father said, "but you're thinking it."

A tense silence followed his words, broken by a branch cracking somewhere in the distance. Both of us flinched.

He smiled without humor. "Bigfoot? That's what you're thinking, isn't it?" He laughed at this. "You think Bigfoot killed those men."

"Maybe we both think—"

"You think Bigfoot killed my dog," He laughed then. He laughed like someone who never shows emotion, explosively, wretchedly, so I knew it came from somewhere deep inside. His laughter went on and on until it finished with a sob.

I had seen him at funerals—I had seen him break a leg after falling from a tree-stand—but this was the first time I had seen him cry. Before I knew what I was doing, I put an arm around his shoulder and drew him against me—and he was utterly overcome.

I thumped him on the back and realized that we had come to change places, if only for a moment. It was a strange place to be, just as it was very strange to look back upon yesterday—it lay so distant, so irrevocable. "I'll be glad when we get out of this canyon," I said.

"Tell me about it." He pulled away from me and he roughly wiped at his eyes. "We're acting pretty unstrung for a couple of old guys, aren't we?"

"Yes."

From far up the canyon there came a low-throated groan, followed by another, closer by, like a strange series of vapors released from the earth. We held our rifles before us, aiming at nothing and at everything.

My father looked at me, red faced and hollow eyed, and I read in his expression what he could never voice out loud: "I feel like the little boy inside me has all of a sudden woken up and reminded me what it feels like to be afraid of the dark."

I knew exactly how he felt. For once we understood each other.

When he started back the way we came, I followed him—and both of us were glad when three hours later we drove from the Ochocos and into the flatter country where among the sagebrush and dry gullies and cattle and knotted systems of fence line we were no longer surrounded by forest. **AS**



Benjamin Percy is a visiting professor at Marquette University. His stories have appeared in *Rosobd*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Greenberg Review*, *Idaho Review*, and many other journals. He dedicates this story to Harry Percy.



Ed Cox lives in the Pacific Northwest, where he spends his days painting science-fiction, fantasy, and wildlife art. His clients include *Roc Books*, *Wizards of the Coast*, the *Sportsman's Guide*, and many trading-card game companies. You can view more of Ed's work at [edcox.com](http://edcox.com) and [edcox.epilog.net](http://edcox.epilog.net)

# Mortal Dance

by David Gerrold  
illustrated by David Seidman

**B**eneath the singing silks, the plaza sparkled with hunger and desire. The last few dancers twirled in the moonlight, turning in despair; the seventh night of Festival had come too soon, only the most desperate revelers remained, no longer floating without effort, trailing radiance in their wake; instead, they spun dispiritedly across the silver tiles, even their reflections seemed limp.

Mariella turned alone, graceful as a ghost, her slippers barely touching the silver tiles, she'd come to dance, and dance she did, she twirled and spun and laughed with inner joy; all of her

the plaza, tall and tacit, waiting patiently, their pale masks glimmering within the darkness of their hooded cloaks; on the first night possibilities abounded, by the last night all the possibilities had vanished, evaporating like the enveloping mist at the approach of dawn, leaving only the empty squares of the silent buildings; life would not begin again until the nests below the vacant city began to bulge with nascent promise.

she danced for the sake of dancing, for the sensation of the cool night air upon her skin, for the fleeting caress of silk across her shimmering breasts, and the satisfying tap and bounce of every step against the shining stone.

*she danced for the sake of dancing, for the sensation of the cool night air upon her skin, for the fleeting caress of silk across her shimmering breasts, and the satisfying tap and bounce of every step against the shining stone.*

companions had already been taken, most on the fourth or fifth night, by the sixth night few remained, those who would not allow a suitor to enfold them.

on the first night the looming spectres had lined the edges of

unlike her sisters, Mariella gave off no perfume, no musky scent of promise, she was one of those unfortunates who carried no eggs; if a suitor took her to his nest, the mating would be barren, no young would hatch; sensing this, no suitor had



stepped forward, no tall dark figure had opened his cloak in invitation soon, in another few hours, when the morning sun finally crept over the horizon, Mariella's body and the bodies of all her barren sisters would lie scattered across the deserted plaza; empty husks, the exhausted detritus of the season, without consummation there was no survival, the daylight scavengers already gathered, circling patiently in the golden air; Mariella knew what awaited, she didn't care, she'd long since accepted her destiny, so she danced to dance and nothing else

and yet, even as she danced, even as she moved across the silver like a whispered wish, she understood the irony of her participation in the mating dance; if she could have chosen, she would have chosen fulfillment, the ecstatic completion of self

the single act of copulation, the insertion of the male organ, penetrating deep and deeper, infusing warmth, and deeper still until the stinger speared and ripped straight through her internal organs,

blackness in the silver floor, he stepped into it and down, vanishing beneath, below

into the luminous cavern, the nesting ground, where all time ended and began again; her eyes went wide with wonder, she'd never dreamt she'd ever see the holy crucible of life, already filled with swollen bodies, recumbent, lambent, indolent; she yearned to lie among them, desire rising so intense it filled her eyes with tears

"no," he whispered, "not here, not you, not now, there is greater life beyond," and then he swept her down again, they dropped deeper now, eventually arriving at a place of subtler luminescence, a place of polished walls and pastel lamps, tapestries, and hanging silks, ancient with meaning

Mariella stood silent with uncertainty and growing fear; behind her, the suitor dropped his robe, its robe, her robe—she was a woman, willowy tall and thin

*Mariella recoiled, shocked beyond belief  
he'd spoken directly to her, monstrous and  
unheard of, she turned to go...*

rapture suffusing through her being as she sank into the final venom-induced coma; her eggs ferociously fertilized, she'd lie torpid in her suitor's nest until the larvae hatched, the hungry little burrowers dine on her ecstatic flesh, she could only imagine the unreachable joy

but not every dancer blossomed, so she twirled for herself, enjoying the beauty of the hollow dance, movement was its own reward, its own satisfaction—and then abruptly, she stopped

In starmoment

blackness blotted out the glimmering night, a pale mask above; a suitor stood before her, arms outstretched, his cloak open and inviting, an intensely powerful male masculine presence, a compelling musky odor

without thinking, without any conscious thought at all, instinctively she bowed before him, arms outspread, head low, her long white neck bared, a dancer's posture; she held steady, breathing hard, her heart pounding as she paused, hesitating, her mind filled with unanswerable questions, finally she lifted her face and looked, not with hope but curiosity

his arm, his hand, velvet black-gloved, came sweeping around, palm up, a gesture of invitation, all she had to do was rise up, reach out, take his hand, step forward, and be enfolded into his cape, then magically she and he would sink out of sight into the comforting depths of the sheltering dark below

or she could refuse, she could turn away, twirl back into the safety of the mortal dance

"there is another life," he whispered; Mariella recoiled, shocked beyond belief—he'd spoken directly to her, monstrous and unheard of, she turned to go, but she was caught, he had her arm, she gasped, he pulled her in against him, his body hard and smoldering, she succumbed and almost fainted with desire, he scooped her up and lifted her aloft, his great black cape flowing in the wind of his movement,

Mariella caught her breath, she turned and turned again, but now she wasn't dancing

the others came out of the shadows, dim figures stepping into the light, tall and graceful and something else as well, old beyond belief, creatures of mystery and legend—the women of time

behind her, the woman who had been her suitor offered her hand again, "come, my sister; no blessed death for you; a greater life awaits, you will have the gift of time; you are a keeper now, a mother of the world"

Mariella fell to the floor and wept **AS**



David Gerrold is the author of the "Trouble with Tribbles" episode of *Star Trek*; the novels *The Man Who Failed Himself*, *When HARLIE Was One*, and *The War against the Chitarr*; and the Hugo and Nebula award-winning story "The Martian Child," about a science-fiction writer who adopts a very strange little boy. New Line Cinema is planning a movie starring John Cusack based on the story.

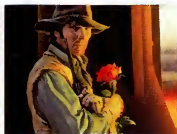


David Seidman is an award-winning illustrator from the Philadelphia area. Through the computer, he is able to combine a perfect blend of photography and paint. To see more work, please visit [www.lunarlightstudios.com](http://www.lunarlightstudios.com).



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## DAREDEVIL DIRECTOR'S CUT

Written and directed by Mark Steven Johnson  
Starring Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner, Colin Farrell,  
Michael Clarke Duncan, Jon Favreau  
Fox, 1 DVD, \$19.98



Given the critics' reactions, one might have thought the widely vilified *Daredevil* was the worst movie of 2003 and its star, the widely decried Ben Affleck, the worst actor of all time.

But rumors of the film's dreadfulness were greatly exaggerated, as folks who've seen both *Daredevil* and the execrable *Batman and Robin* can testify. He's no Tobey Maguire (*Spider-Man*), but Affleck effectively portrayed Marvel Comics' blind superhero and his lawyer alter ego, Matt Murdock. The ninety-minute, PG-13-rated movie's downfall was actually an unusual one: it was too short. Logic went missing as the breakneck plot whipped through *Daredevil*'s losses and redemption.

*Daredevil Director's Cut* cures this problem, and the DVD's featurette, "Giving the Devil His Due," reveals its cause: studio executives made writer-director Mark Steven Johnson (Simon Birch) delete the scenes that developed the characters and made sense of the story.

Darker and grittier (and R-rated) at 124 minutes, *Daredevil Director's Cut* provides an enormously improved viewing experience. It fleshes out young Murdock's (Scott Terra) relationship with his father (boxer Jack "the Devil" Murdock, portrayed by David Keith, of *White of the Eye*), strengthening *Daredevil*'s ultimate motivation for deadly vigilantism. The adult Murdock receives deeper development too; a restored subplot shows him as a lawyer accepting only innocent clients, defending a poor criminal (Coolio, of *Dracula 3000*) falsely accused (or is he?) of murder. The storyline reveals the critical relationship between Murdock and his law partner, Franklin "Foggy" Nelson (Jon Favreau, of *Swingers*), and also gives *Daredevil* more reason to hate New York's secret crime boss, the Kingpin.

The bad guys receive increased attention, too. Viewers finally will understand how suave businessman Wilson Fisk (played with masterful ruthlessness by *The Green Mile*'s Michael Clarke Duncan) became the Kingpin. Colin Farrell (*Alexander*) gleefully devours his expanded scenery as Fisk's egomaniacal assassin, Bullseye, an Irish Charles Manson who skipped card creation to master the art of turning innocent peanuts and playing cards into deadly projectiles. The baddies' expanded fight scenes with *Daredevil* further develop the relationships between the enemies.

This version of the film eliminates two scenes with Murdock's martial-artist girlfriend, Elektra, played with kickass panache by Jennifer Garner (*Alias*). One is genuinely dispensable (first-date sex is probably unlikely for these two commitmentphobes), while the other is more important (developing their relationship and explaining why an upper-class Greek-American woman knows ninjutsu). Still, the romance works, though Murdock/*Daredevil*'s expanded screen time makes the relationship less central than in the theatrical release.

This edition of the film also makes it clear Johnson was inspired by the *Daredevil* comics of legendary writer-artist Frank Miller, who revitalized the series in the 1980s and, in so doing, created Elektra. Like Miller, Johnson understands that the most important thing about *Daredevil* isn't his superenhanced senses, superheric exploits, or supervillainous enemies: the most important thing about *Daredevil* is Matt Murdock.

Which isn't to say that *Daredevil Director's Cut* is flawless. It retains Johnson's needless alteration of the character's origin, debasing Murdock from a teenager blinded while courageously saving a man's life to a coward who incidentally loses his eyesight while fleeing neighborhood bullies and the sight of his dad's misdeeds. And even in this cut, a badly wounded *Daredevil* displays impossible recovery powers at the climax. This version also preserves the shocking alteration of *Daredevil* from a hero who never kills to a cold-blooded vigilante slayer.

Fans of extras will be disappointed by the paucity on *Daredevil Director's Cut*, whose lone disc offers only the fresh featurette and a new commentary track by the director and producer (in annoying contrast to the theatrical release's bonus-stuffed two DVDs). One would think the new release would at least offer a plug for the Elektra motion picture. Viewers should also be forewarned: don't sneak a peek at "Giving the Devil His Due" before watching the movie—it gives away all the changes.

—Cynthia Ward

### Miller classics that obviously inspired Johnson:

- *Daredevil Visionaries: Volumes 1–3*
- *Daredevil Legends Volume 2: Born Again*
- *Daredevil Legends Volume 3: The Man without Fear*

## Gamera Complete DVD Collection

Directed by Shusuke Kaneka

Written by Kazunori Itô and Shusuke Kaneka

Starring Shinabô Nakayama, Ayaka

Fujitani, Miki Mizuno, Yukijiro Hataori

ADV, 3 DVDs, \$39.98



Created by Daiiei Studio in 1965 as an answer to rival studio Toho's successful stable of movie monsters, the gigantic fire-breathing turtle Gamera has never garnered the attention or respect lavished upon Godzilla and his *kaiju* (giant monster) cohorts. From the start, the Gamera series was rather odd, reaching the height of weirdness in 1969 with *Attack of the Monsters*, wherein the knife-headed beastie Guiron literally chops Space Gyaos limb from limb and evil space women hunger for the brains of Earth kids. Fortunately, things improved for the gargantuan reptile in the mid-1990s, when the creature was resurrected for three adventures that were theatrically released in Japan.

This trio of relatively recent Gamera films, presented here in a "limited-edition" boxed set (a fresh sound mix and embossed box are the primary extras), are a serious, oftentimes grim trilogy that will be a pleasant shock to those who have only seen the giant turtle's lesser efforts rightfully mocked on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. This Gamera is part earth spirit, part genetically engineered agent of the lost kingdom of Atlantis. His main adversaries throughout the trilogy are the Gyaos, flesh-eating birdlike creatures that serve as a symbol for technology run amok: the flying, tentacled Iris; and the insectlike alien swarm known as Legion. The special effects, apart from a few awkward puppets, are surprisingly good, and the fight scenes are uniformly terrific, smartly conveying the size and destructive power of these giants. In several sequences, the human toll of the beasts' rampages is chronicled in graphic detail, lending the stories dramatic weight and emotional impact often lacking in other *kaiju* films. The movies also benefit from a few continuing characters, useful in showing the longer-term impact of the monsters' arrival. Especially effective are Ayako Fujitani as a sort-of priestess of Gamera and Yukijiro Hataori as hapless Inspector Osako, whose encounters with the Gyaos take him from police officer to drunken derelict over the course of the trilogy.

The films boast a number of striking shots—Gyaos perched upon the ruined Tokyo Tower at sunset, the vast underwater graveyard of failed Gamera—as well as some very clever plotting. In fact, the first half of *Gamera 2: Attack of Legion* has more in common with the classic science-fiction/horror film *Quatermass and the Pit* than the legendary Godzilla slugfest *Destroy All Monsters*. Unfortunately, the scripts for all three Gamera pictures also lose focus at times, wandering here and there into confusing subplots involving Gamera's ties to children and the role of "mana" in the world's moral balance. Despite those weaknesses, screenwriter Kazunori Itô (*Ghost in the Shell*) and director Shusuke Kaneko (*Godzilla*, *Matra* and *King Gidorah: Giant Monsters All-Out Attack*) do a remarkable job creating three of the most entertaining monster movies of the past decade, films that give the flying turtle the edge over the more venerable King of the Monsters, at least when it comes to the quality of their most recent cinematic stomps.

—James Lowder

### More must-see *kaiju* eiga:

- *Godzilla* (1954)
- *Godzilla vs. the Thing* (1964)
- *Destroy All Monsters* (1968)



## Millennium: The Complete Second Season

Directed by David Nutter, Thomas J. Wright, James Charlestan, et al.

Written by Glen Morgan and James Wang, Darin Morgan, et al.

Starring Lance Henriksen, Megan Gallagher, Terry O'Quinn

Fax, 6 DVDs, \$59.98



After Chris Carter hitched *The X-Files* to the back bumper of his '87 Nissan Pathfinder and dragged it through the mud for those last five or six seasons, it's hard to remember why anyone was ever excited about the show: an entire generation of TV viewers still can't read a bad poem without hearing it in David Duchovny's voiceover mumble. Nevertheless, there were those four or five truly outstanding installments—the ones everyone still remembers. The circus freaks. The episode where Charles Nelson Reilly gleefully tears into a heaping plate of scenery tartare as a flamboyant sci-fi hack. Peter Boyle cracking jokes while prophesizing the particulars of his own death.

It turns out that the common thread running through all those episodes was writer Darin Morgan. His scripts were always exceptionally tight and unexpectedly clever. He was Joss Whedon back when *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was just a bad movie.

In the second season of *Millennium*, *The X-Files*' sister series, Morgan came aboard as a consulting producer and he, along with a couple of other *X-Files* veterans (including Morgan's brother Glen, who together with writing partner James Wong created the underappreciated series *Space: Above and Beyond*), succeeded in making *Millennium* a lot more interesting. The tepid "psychokiller flavor of the week" episodes that dominated the initial season are almost entirely gone, replaced by mystic thrillers that are a lot less shy about exploiting the series' apocalyptic backdrop. It comes as no surprise that the season's very best episodes, "Jose Chung's Doomsday Defense" and "Somehow, Satan Got behind Me," were both written by Darin Morgan himself. The former is an amusing sendup of cult religions that brings back Charles Nelson Reilly's hack novelist from *The X-Files*, while the latter introduces us to an entertaining coffee klatch of demons who meet up at a donut counter to engage in a little shop talk.

According to the Internet Movie Database, Darin Morgan hasn't written anything in eight years, so anyone producing a genre series that could use a good shot in the arm might want to look him up. (Alas, Smallville—this means you!)

—Ray Winninger

### Darin Morgan's greatest *X-Files* hits:

- "Blood" (Season 2)
- "Humbug" (Season 2)
- "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose" (Season 3)
- "War of the Coprophages" (Season 3)
- "Jose Chung's From Outer Space" (Season 3)

# CRYPTO FILE

by James Lowder

Before he came to the United States and made a name for himself in Universal Pictures' *Dracula*, Bela Lugosi—better known to the world as Bela Lugosi—had been a successful stage actor in Hungary, more likely to play Romeo or Christ than a creature of the night. Regrettably, the popularity of his turn as Count Dracula typecast him in the minds of moviegoers, and he spent the rest of his career distanced from his classical roots. That's not to say he never got the chance to show his acting chops, in both higher-budget horror fare from Universal and RKO and the three rather obscure, low-budget flicks highlighted here.



## White Zombie

Directed by Victor Halperin

Written by Garnett Weston

Starring Bela Lugosi, Madge Bellamy, Robert Frazer, John Harron  
 Raan, I DVD, \$14.95



The publication of William Seabrook's 1929 travelogue *The Magic Island*, based upon the author's experiences in Haiti, added a new monster to American popular culture: the zombie. Before long, Hollywood offered up its first take on the living dead with this weird thriller. Lugosi plays Murder Legendre, who systematically and ruthlessly turns anyone who annoys or interests him into a shuffling servant, courtesy of a local Haitian poison. The lingering aftereffects of silent-cinema conventions show in the often-silted acting and the paucity of dialogue, but inventive camerawork and Lugosi's screen presence help make this 1932 production a minor horror classic. The scene in which Legendre smugly reminds a mute and dying victim of earlier social slights is especially memorable.

Less expensive DVD editions of *White Zombie* abound, but this Roan Group disc boasts an excellent print and a commentary track by Lugosi scholar Gary Don Rhodes. Lugosi turned down director Victor Halperin for the 1936 follow-up, *Revel of the Zombies*, though he appeared in the film anyway, through the reuse of closeups of his eyes.

(continued on page 69)



## New Fist of the North Star, Volume One: The Cursed City!

Directed by Takashi Watanabe

Written by Nabuhika Harie and Hiroshi Toda (screenplay),

Buronson and Tetsuo Hara (story)

ADV, I DVD, \$29.98



Japan's most famous martial-arts anime/manga series, *Fist of the North Star*, hasn't fared well in America. The 1980s-1990s English-language versions had lame translations that, together with weak animation, a simplistic storyline, extreme violence, and hypermuscular heroes, served as little more than camp candidates for *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

The original *Fist of the North Star* is essentially *Road Warrior* meets *Rocky*, with *Mad Max* replaced by Kenshiro, a scarred, kung-fu-fighting Rocky Balboa. Kenshiro roams a postapocalyptic desert, seeking his kidnapped girlfriend while saving a new helpless village in each installment from a different villainous biker gang. Though alone and unarmed, Kenshiro always succeeds in destroying the wicked, for he is master of the mystical martial art *hokuto* shinken, which bursts the heads of his myriad opponents.

This bloody formula largely recurs in *The Cursed City!*—the first of the three volumes in this reimagined anime miniseries. Saving a village, Kenshiro meets Myne, a crippled orphan girl who captures his heart, and Sára, a beautiful doctor who heals with a touch. When he briefly leaves town, the biker gang returns, slaughtering everyone except Sára, whom they take to the Cursed City. Kenshiro follows, to avenge Myne and rescue Sára.

*The Cursed City!* introduces some positive changes to the *Fist* formula. The ultraviolence of earlier incarnations is subordinate to the uncharacteristically solid and self-contained story. The girlfriend subplot is blessedly absent, allowing Myne and Sára to provide Kenshiro with far-more-believable motivation. The respectful translation heightens tension while avoiding camp melodrama. Like the story, the animation—a mix of CG and traditional cel imagery—is vastly improved (though the Cursed City looks like a copy-and-paste from a computer game). *New Fist of the North Star* should consequently win many fresh fans, even among critics of the old *Fist* translations.

—Cynthia Ward

### More rock-'em, sock-'em anime slugfests:

- *Fatal Fury* (1992-1994)
- *Street Fighter II* (1994)
- *Tekken* (1998)





## Code 46

**Directed by** Michael Winterbottom  
**Written by** Frank Cottrell Boyce  
**Starring** Tim Robbins, Samantha Morton  
**MGM, 1 DVD, \$26.98**

★★★★★  
 Michael Winterbottom's futuristic detective story is less science fiction than speculative social commentary. You don't have to dig deep to find echoes of *Gattaca*, 1984, and *Brave New World* sounding through this detached study in alienation, social regimentation, and economic disparity in a near future where genetic engineering has rewritten the social code.

The texture of this future—colorless, alienated gated communities and lifeless deserts sucked dry of resources at the fringes—is more interesting than the dispassionate love story between Robbins and Morton, who have little chemistry. It works better intellectually than emotionally, though Morton's frosty narration adds a *La Jetée*-like melancholy to the tale.

In the disc's sketchy but intriguing sixteen-minute featurette "Obtaining Cover: Inside Code 46," Winterbottom and Cottrell Boyce describe the story as Oedipus with a twist—in the twenty-first century, genetics becomes fate—but never get the opportunity to probe the idea in any detail. However, the fragmented behind-the-scenes shots do provide a glimpse of the real-world environment shaped into the amazing world seen on the screen.

—Sean Axmaker

### Creating the future on a budget:

- *THX 1138* (1971)
- *Mod Max* (1979)
- *Escape from New York* (1981)



## Ed Wood

**Directed by** Tim Burton  
**Written by** Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski  
**Starring** Johnny Depp, Martin London, Sarah Jessica Parker  
**Buena Vista, 1 DVD, \$29.99**

★★★★★  
 In a lot of ways, Tim Burton is the Bizarro Ed Wood. Wood's flicks were bargain-basement home movies shot by a man with so little talent that it's not unfair to wonder whether he bothered to actually watch any movies before trying to make his own. At the core of each of his films was a clumsily constructed big idea, a moral he believed to be so powerful that it would trump his schlocky sets and wooden actors.

Tim Burton's output, on the other hand, consists almost entirely of megabudgeted triumphs of style over substance. He seems interested in big ideas only to the extent that they are useful for buttering up studio moneybags. His forte is obsessively detailed eye candy, and almost nobody does it better.

Given this odd yin-yang, there should be an obvious irony hanging over Burton's 1994 *Ed Wood* biopic, but it never materializes. The director somehow forswears his usual MO and constructs an unexpectedly spare, character- and story-driven delivery mechanism for a genuinely uplifting big idea. The end result almost defies description. It's funny, clever, moving, and, most importantly, wholly original—perhaps the only attribute the films of Wood and Burton have in common.

—Ray Winninger

### Ed Wood's trilogy of terror:

- *Bride of the Monster* (1955)
- *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959)
- *Night of the Ghouls* (1959)



## Iron Giant

**Directed by** Brad Bird  
**Written by** Tim McCanlies (screenplay), Brad Bird (screen story), Ted Hughes (book)  
**Warner, 1 DVD, \$19.96**

★★★★★  
 "I'm the luckiest kid in the world," cheers adolescent Hogarth, halfway to science-fiction heaven in the hand of a friendly ten-story robot as they march through the forests of coastal Maine in search of scrap metal. Brad Bird's free adaptation of the Ted Hughes children's novel *The Iron Man* is a cartoon fable in science-fiction clothing and fairy-tale trappings.

Bird uses the conflicts inherent in the 1957 setting to marry nostalgic simplicity and rural serenity with Cold War paranoia and space-age fears. Kids respond to the wish-fulfillment fantasy and giddy friendship, and the funhouse mirror look at the politics of fear couldn't be more timely, yet the heart of the film is a simple message of love and sacrifice that cuts across all ages: "You are what you choose to be."

The original release featured a brief making-of documentary, which is nowhere to be seen on this special edition. The highlights of this disc are viewer-friendly commentary by Bird and three key collaborators and a "Behind the Armor" viewing mode with thirteen branching, bite-sized minidocumentaries—not quite the deluxe edition the film deserves but still very much appreciated.

—Sean Axmaker

### More boy-bot bonding

- *Tabar the Great* (1954)
- *Frankenstein Jr.* (1966–1968)
- *Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot* (1999–2001)

## Crypto File

(continued from page 68)

## Phantom Ship



**Directed by** Denison Clift  
**Written by** Denison Clift and Charles Larkwarthy  
**Starring** Bela Lugosi, Arthur Margetsan, Shirley Grey  
**Image, 1 DVD, \$14.99**

★★★★★  
 The *Mystery of the Mary Celeste*—known in the United States as *Phantom Ship*—was released in 1935 and was Lugosi's first British film. It was a rare chance for the horror icon to portray a character far more complex than the stock heavies and mad scientists he'd been playing with increasing frequency in Hollywood post-*Dracula*.

As grizzled, one-armed sailor Anton Lorenzen, Lugosi stands at the center of a fictionalized account of the disappearance of the *Mary Celeste*'s crew, a saga set against an unrelentingly grim depiction of life at sea. The production is hobbled by uneven technical work in sound and special effects, and a script that sometimes fails to capitalize on the strong central concept of a murderer eliminating the small crew of the brig one by one. But Lugosi shines as the mournful seaman, broken and shuffling one moment, wrathful and frighteningly vigorous the next. The film was the second for the fledgling Hammer Studios, which would become synonymous with British horror cinema in the 1950s and 1960s.

(continued on page 70)

## Crypto File

(continued from page 69)

### The Human Monster



Directed by Walter Summers  
Written by Patrick Kirwan,  
Walter Summers, and  
John Argyle  
Starring Bela Lugosi,  
Hugh Williams, Greta Gynt  
Gotham Distribution, I DVD,  
\$7.98



Adapted from a novel by bestselling author Edgar Wallace, *The Dark Eyes of London*—a.k.a. *The Human Monster*—is a surprisingly gruesome film and another British production that gave Lugosi a chance at a challenging role. This time the actor plays Dr. Orloff, a disgraced physician and insurance agent who also serves as patron of a home for the destitute blind. When bodies start turning up in the Thames, the energetic Inspector Holt of Scotland Yard (Hugh Williams) traces the crimes back to Orloff.

The first half of the 1939 film works well as a police procedural, and the twist ending still packs a punch. The movie's effectiveness as a shocker lies in its startlingly blunt depiction of murder and mayhem. Feeble comic relief provided by a trigger-happy and doltish American cop (Edmond Ryan), the Watson to Williams's Holmes, breaks the tension from time to time, but never for long. Oddly, Dr. Orloff seems at times to exert a hypnotic influence over both his secretary and his victims, a strange touch of fantasy in this otherwise sober horror tale and an apparent nod to the continuing influence of *Dracula* on Lugosi's screen identity.



### Ju-On

Written and directed by  
Takashi Shimizu  
Starring Megumi Okina,  
Misaki Ito, Misa Uehara  
Lions Gate, I DVD, \$24.98



Takashi Shimizu's Lovecraftian creepfest *Ju-On* is short on story and sketchy on character but long on atmosphere, eerie imagery, and ghost-story goosebumps. A "ju-on" is a curse left behind by someone who dies in a powerful rage—part haunting, part supernatural virus that infects anyone who comes into contact with it. And that's not just the film's premise, it's also the plot in a nutshell.

The story is somewhat sloppy—Shimizu streamlined it for his American remake, *The Grudge*—but he has an old-fashioned sense of scary movies and creates an atmosphere of dread from simple techniques: blank-faced ghosts with hollow yet desperate expressions and imaginative sound effects that are at once unearthy and unsettlingly human. There's no real dramatic payoff, but it is unrelentingly chilling and unnerving.

The commentary by Sam Raimi and Scott Spiegel—both fellow film professionals and horror-movie fans—is unexpectedly good. The package also includes an extended alternate ending and epilogue (shown in its unfinished video rough cut and accompanied by Shimizu's commentary), various deleted scenes, and interviews with Shimizu and the cast.

—Sean Axmaker

**Further frightful Japanese ghost stories:**

- *Onibaba* (1964)
- *Ringu* (1998)
- *Dark Water* (2002)



### Lady Death: The Motion Picture

Directed by Andrew Orjuela  
Written by Carl Macek (screenplay),  
Brian Pulido (story idea)  
ADV, I DVD, \$29.98



As anyone who watches Japanese animation knows, having all hell cut loose is nothing new. Considering this fact, *Lady Death: The Motion Picture*, based on the comic-book character created by Brian Pulido, is a nice try, but no cigar: It's simply eye candy marred by poor pacing and ever-present predictability.

Opening with a modified account of *Lady Death*'s comic-book origins, the animators get it right regarding character design and other visual details. It's cleaner looking than the comics, but there's only so much that can be done with good animation, and that's where the accolades for *Lady Death* end.

The picture continually slips in both pace and plot. And even though it's primarily set in hell—a setting ripe for over-the-top adventure and fantasy—it remains pretty much a standard revenge tale. The final combat scenes in particular leave much to be desired: the myriad demons and zombies supposedly charging into battle look more like sleepwalking extras than adrenalin-charged attackers. Even the voice work never really gets off the ground.

At its conclusion *Lady Death* virtually screams sequel. Pray to God that doesn't happen—it would truly be eternal damnation.

—Steve Fritz

**Anime where real hell cuts loose:**

- *Heiling* (2002)
- *Ninja Scroll* (2003)
- *Reign: The Conqueror* (1997)



### The Saddest Music in the World

Directed by Guy Maddin  
Written by George Toles and  
Guy Maddin (screenplay),  
Kazuo Ishiguro (novel)  
Starring Mark McKinney and  
Isabella Rossellini  
MGM, I DVD, \$29.98



Canadian auteur Guy Maddin (*Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary*) has built a career out of making films that look like no one else's. And while his movies may ape the stylistic conventions of the 1920s and 1930s, they are also wholly original arrangements. His first picture, *Tales From the Gimli Hospital*, established his rigorous aesthetic: grainy black-and-white (though sometimes tinted) imagery, along with title cards, manipulated film stock, and scratchy audio.

By Maddin's indie standards, *The Saddest Music in the World* is truly an epic. Like a demented Olympics, musicians representing countries from around the world compete in Depression-era Winnipeg to render the most heartbreaking song ever heard. The contest is presided over by Isabella Rossellini (Blue Velvet) as a legless beer baroness, whose torrid affair with boisterous American showman Mark McKinney (*Kids in the Hall*, *Saturday Night Live*) includes a pair of beer-filled glass legs. It's an over-the-top trip, delightfully funny and genuinely original.

—John Tynes

**Further Canadian perversions:**

- *Necrophilia in Kissed* (1996)
- *Car-wreck sex in Crash* (1996)
- *Drug abuse in Kids in the Hall: Brain Candy* (1996)



## Tales of Tomorrow: Collection One

Directed by Dan Medford, Leonard Valenta, Charles Dubin, and Leslie Garall

Written by Theodore Sturgeon, Arthur C. Clarke, Mel Goldberg, Mann Rubin, et al.

Starring Paul Newman, Lee J. Cobb, Veronica Lake, Lon Chaney Jr. Image, 2 DVDs, \$24.99



Believe it or not, there once was a time when science fiction was a rarity on TV. Although there were a handful of futuristic children's shows on the air, at the dawn of the age of television there was no regularly scheduled, adult-oriented science-fiction series. That changed on August 3, 1951, with the debut of *Tales of Tomorrow*.

All but forgotten nowadays, this pioneering anthology program showcased tantalizing adventures frequently adapted from well-known science-fiction stories. The initial half-hour episode, "Verdict From Space," offers an uneven but intriguing alien-invasion yarn penned by Theodore Sturgeon, with subsequent installments providing imaginative retellings of famous fables from Cyril Kornbluth ("The Little Black Bag"), Nelson Bond ("Test Flight," based on his short story "Vital Factor"), and Stanley G. Weinbaum ("The Miraculous Serum," derived from "The Adaptive Ultimate"). Additional highlights include a misguided interpretation of *Frankenstein*, with an inebriated Lon Chaney Jr.—who thought the live telecast was a dress rehearsal—stumbling around the set, and "Ice From Space," featuring Paul Newman in a bit role as a sergeant facing a frightening frozen menace.

The performances are often staid and, since videotape had not yet been perfected (the thirteen black-and-white episodes on this collection were all recorded via kinescope), the image quality is imperfect. Yet the series retains an intoxicating "sense of wonder." *Tales of Tomorrow* may be barely remembered today, but without this groundbreaking effort the ultramodern TV adventures viewers now take for granted simply might not exist.

—Jeff Berkowitz

### Additional *Tales of Tomorrow* adaptations:

- "Knock," by Fredric Brown
- "Dune Roller," by Julian May
- "Errand Boy," by William Tenn



## On the Road with Ellison, Volume Two

By Harlan Ellison

Deep Shag Records, 1 CD, 70:37 min., \$17.99



As anyone who has attended a lecture by Harlan Ellison already knows, the man could elicit reactions ranging from laughs to rapt attention simply by reading his grocery list. He embodies the sort of verbal skill found in great actors like Orson Welles and Laurence Olivier, or brilliant voice specialists like Mel Blanc. That said, the second volume of the fascinating *On the Road with Ellison* series—chronicling some of the writer's many appearances at various colleges and conventions—doesn't measure up to the first recording, a well-received collection released in 2002.

There are plenty of oddball anecdotes among the thirteen cuts, including Ellison's encounters with *Star Trek* fans, plus a few eyebrow-raising, behind-the-scenes tales—like the story of Hollywood's mistreatment of his excellent *I, Robot* movie script, or how he made then-governor Ronald Reagan's "Enemies List"—all of which ably demonstrate the author's "low bullshit threshold." What's missing is a moving piece like the one that ends *Volume One* (an essay that drives home the importance of protest against the powers that be). Here Ellison closes the album with a biting selection titled "And Now, the Sermon and Soup," about the value of reading (and thus, living) wisely. Nevertheless, *On the Road with Ellison, Volume Two* will prove entertaining for both armchair adventurers and road warriors burning up blacktop.

—Dorman T. Shindler

### More spoken-word CDs that'll prick up your ears:

- *On the Road with Ellison, Volume One*, by Harlan Ellison
- *The Carnegie Hall Concert*, by Lenny Bruce
- *Reality ... What a Concept*, by Robin Williams



# BOOKS



## POWERSAT

By Ben Bova  
Forge, hardcover, \$24.95



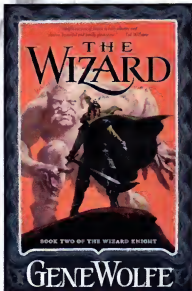
Hard-science fiction ain't what it used to be, thank God or the spirit of Reason or—well, most likely we should thank the readers, who demanded compelling plots and believable characters and started getting them in the 1960s and 1970s. Natural selection did the rest, and today the term feels somewhat archaic as hard-SF has essentially become mainstream. Authors like Neal Stephenson, David Brin, and Ben Bova mix their speculations and extrapolations into first-rate stories, and everyone seems to be happy. *Powersat* is a perfect example. It adds Tom Clancy-like danger and intrigue to a subject that makes most people's eyes roll back in their heads: the looming global energy crisis.

Of course, Bova's hero, the harried technobusiness owner Dan Randolph, has an answer in the form of solar-energy satellites beaming cheap power to Earth. The machinations to keep him from his dream are intricate and ruthless and reach all the way to the top levels of American and international politics. Randolph, while likable, doesn't draw readers in so much as keep them following along breathlessly as he plots and moves against his shortsighted enemies. Nevertheless, as events build, it hardly matters—what he does becomes much more important than what he feels. His depths are no less real for being hinted at rather than plumbed, and ultimately his drama is a shadow of a real choice we'll all be facing very soon.

—Rob Lightner

### The harder they come:

- *Cryptonomicon*, by Neal Stephenson
- *Altered Carbon*, by Richard Morgan
- *Swift Thoughts*, by George Zebrowski



## THE WIZARD

By Gene Wolfe  
Tor, hardcover, \$25.95



The tragedy of Gene Wolfe—one of America's great science-fiction authors—is that he's too literary for much of fandom and too speculative for the literati. Writers and critics love him; readers stay away in droves, and *The Wizard* won't correct the problem.

The concluding volume of *The Knight* (reviewed in *Amazing Stories* 603), *The Wizard* is a literary fantasy written with little regard for readers who aren't paying close attention. It continues the story of Sir Able, an American who has entered a many-layered world of aelfs, dragons, and giants; he became a knight, then died and returned. Sometimes the elaborate setting and large cast slow down the plot. The story thread wanders gently over the tale rather than rushing headlong to the finish, and it even stops completely for "Oh, but I haven't told you that" asides. At several points Sir Able's narration is maddeningly obtuse, and he flat-out refuses to offer details regarding some events. Certain fans will enjoy figuring out these undescribed incidents; others will just give up in annoyance.

Wolfe's nested heavens, Earth, and hells are so convincing they seem inevitable; his aelf and nonhuman characters are rich and strange, and his mastery of medieval language and customs makes the setting completely believable. But he ignores modern fantasy staples: magic is mysterious, character motivations can be obscure, good and evil are not always clear, and an epic fight involving a dozen participants may resolve itself in a single paragraph. *The Wizard* is better than the latest David Eddings and Robert Jordan novels, but it will never attract the same legion of fans. "It's too hard," readers will say, with some justification. "I don't get it." Written in a style from fifty years ago, the book's appeal to modern readers is a question each must answer individually.

—Wolfgang Baur

### Wellsprings of chivalric fantasy:

- *Three Hearts and Three Lions*, by Paul Anderson
- *The King of Elfland's Daughter*, by Lord Dunsany
- *The Wood beyond the World*, by William Morris





## Crache

By Mark Budz  
Spectra, paperback, \$6.99



Although *Crache* takes place in the same future as Clode, Mark Budz's first novel and a Philip K. Dick Award finalist, it follows different characters and can be read on its own. Fola is an ex-Jesuit, deprogrammed from her nanochemical enslavement as, literally, a cheerleader for religion. While struggling to build a new life on a geengineered asteroid, Fola learns that a nasty virus has infected several isolated groups. With the help of Peidoh, her personal IA (information agent), Fola makes virtual contact with a disabled musician on Earth whose past may hold the key to stopping the virus.

*Crache* offers a fascinating glimpse into the biological possibilities of cyberspace, as well as inventive new levels of corporate and religious oppression. The book's ethnic elements, including the La Llorana legend and a new type of migrant workforce, add a human touch Post-ecocast technofuture. Still, the emotional immediacy is dimmed by the fact that the characters' paths provide more meaningful suspense than the current crisis. It's also sometimes unclear whether the characters are moving physically, virtually, or both (although that may be deliberate), and some of the specific technological details are difficult to understand. In that sense, *Crache* is not an easy read, but nanobuffs will find it worth the effort.

—Amy Simon

### Other flights of nonofancy:

- *Bloom*, by Will McCarthy
- *Accidental Creatures*, by Anne Harris
- *The Bohr Maker*, by Linda Nagata



## Exultant

By Stephen Baxter  
Del Rey, hardcover, \$25.95



*Exultant* targets readers who enjoy *Enterprise* technical manuals, look to science fiction to teach hard science, and speculate on scientific theories. The detailed descriptions are testament to the author's attention to world building. Baxter also explores implications of futuristic technology including the ins and outs of time travel and its limitations, the etiquette of meeting oneself, and the potential of time travel in battle. But for bookworms expecting a story, forget it.

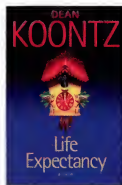
The plot runs with all the fury of "if... then" computer code, sending characters on a grand tour of the galaxy while grinding through endless subroutines that cover potential futures, physics theories, and the thrill of project management. For every action, readers get reams of description before the characters' reaction, expanding what should have been a novella into a novel. The characters constantly spout distasteful philosophies and pop psychologies. And the writing! The passive voice gets a workout; clunky phrases like "astrophysical diorama" and "monumental panorama" abound.

Baxter is a talented author with the prizes to prove it, including the Philip K. Dick Award. He can clearly do better than *Exultant*.

—Shelly Baur

### Close encounters of the future kind:

- *The Sparrow*, by Mary Doria Russell
- *Enders Game*, by Orson Scott Card
- *Contact*, by Carl Sagan



## Life Expectancy

By Dean Koontz  
Bantam, hardcover, \$27.00



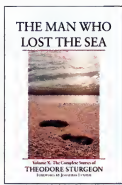
Suspension of disbelief becomes difficult if all the characters one encounters in a given story are gifted with abnormal powers of perception and/or cursed with ill-fated futures. That's usually the case where Koontz protagonists are concerned, and Jimmy Tock, the hero of *Life Expectancy*, is no exception. Worse, the surfeit of unusual names in Tock's universe—Punchinello (really!), Dr. Mello Melodean, Virgilio Vivacamente—kill any remaining verisimilitude and may make you wonder if you've picked up a Lemmy Snicket book by mistake.

Destined to live through "five terrible days" (scattered over more than a decade) foreseen by his dying paternal grandfather, Tock meets each date with foreknowledge and a stiff upper lip, as does his lover. Unfortunately, these stock Koontz characters come off rather salted, and the two-sentence paragraphs in the first part of the novel are almost as distracting as the artificially drawn-out suspense. The payoff—a denouement that reads like a parody of *Chinatown*—is a letdown, as are the metafictional author tricks. Although it could be argued that Koontz is writing strictly tongue-in-cheek, maudlin ruminations like those in chapter sixty-two make it doubtful. *Life Expectancy* would've been a great antic thriller had the author used less sugar and a lot more spice.

—Dorman T. Shindler

### Try Life Expectancy if you liked:

- *Darkness*, by John Saul
- *The Power*, by Frank M. Robinson
- *The Bridges of Madison County*, by Robert James Waller



## The Man Who Lost the Sea—Vol. X: The Complete Stories of Theodore Sturgeon

Edited by Poul Williams  
North Atlantic, hardcover, \$35.00



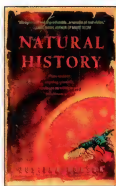
*The Man Who Lost the Sea*, a collection by one of the all-time-great storytellers (part of a series started in 1994) contains excellent fiction that even aficionados may not have read (such as "The Man Who Figured Everything," a Western-mystery written with Don Ward). As with most of Sturgeon's collections, the stories run the gamut of genres: from horror, with "The Graveyard Reader" (one of Boris Karloff's favorite tales), in which the protagonist comes to terms with his own grief via the help of an unusual man, to the title story, which was nominated for a Hugo Award in 1959 and included in *The Best American Short Stories* that year.

Notes by Williams include insights such as a letter in which Sturgeon proclaimed that "A Touch of Strange"—a beautifully written love story that walks a fine line between fantasy and mainstream—was a failure. Fortunately, one of his editors convinced him otherwise. Like the nine stories preceding it, volume ten of Sturgeon's short-story output is essential reading for lovers of great fiction.

—Dorman T. Shindler

### Respectable retrospectives:

- *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*, by Ray Bradbury
- *The Essential Hal Clement Vol. I: Trio for Slide Rule and Typewriter*, by Hal Clement
- *The Leibler Chronicles*, by Fritz Leibler



## Natural History

By Justino Robson  
Spectra, trade paperback,  
\$13.00



In a distant future, advances in technology have helped create fantastic human-machine hybrids—the Forged—and put them to work in jobs deemed too menial or dangerous for Unevolved humans. Fifteen light years from home, the badly damaged Forged explorer Voyager Lonestar Isl encounters a chunk of gray quartz—the Stuff—which heals her and transports her back to Gaisol space instantly with the offer of a lifetime: a far-off Earth-type planet perfectly suited to become a homeworld to the Forged, who long for freedom.

If you think the offer sounds too good to be true, you aren't alone. Robson stirs equal amounts of paranoid suspicion and hope into *Natural History* and shows why both are more than justified when the Stuff reveals its true nature. The world building is solid, owing much to boundary-breaking space-opera writers such as Iain M. Banks (*State of the Art*) and Ken MacLeod (*Newton's Wake*). The story shifts smoothly between points of view, though some major characters aren't fully developed, making their actions seem motivated by demands of plot rather than personality. Despite this flaw, Robson's intriguing blend of gritty high-tech and the lure of the unknown composes a thought-provoking space opera.

—Charlene Brusso

More "offers you can't refuse":

- *Childhood's End*, by Arthur C. Clarke
- *Excession*, by Iain M. Banks
- *Singularity Sky*, by Charles Stross



## Polaris

By Jack McDevitt  
Ace, hardcover, \$24.95



The latest Jack McDevitt outing, *Polaris*, concerns the titular ship, whose crew all vanished sixty years earlier. Two antiquarians, Alex Benedict and Chase Kolpath, slowly unravel the *Polaris*'s secrets after artifacts from the vessel go up for auction, and the pair become the targets of a series of assassination attempts. Ultimately, the plot hinges on a science-fiction device, yet the book is paced around the investigation, not the science. The author's setting and characters make for light and easy reading, but the mystery itself requires just that single science-fictional element.

The main characters are pretty simple, and the action doesn't keep you glued, but the story moves along smoothly. Chase and Alex mostly avoid an ever-more-elaborate series of murder attempts while attempting to solve a mystery that many readers will guess from broad hints about halfway through. McDevitt fans expecting sweeping space combat like that of *A Talent for War* will be disappointed. The military elements are all historical, and there's very little combat, space-borne or otherwise. The pacing is more akin to any Earth-based mystery novel; the planet hopping and future tech are all strictly secondary to questions of motive, method, and opportunity.

—Wolfgang Baur

Science-fiction mysteries:

- *The Naked Sun*, by Isaac Asimov
- *Iran Sunrise*, by Charles Stross
- *A Philosophical Investigation*, by Phillip Kerr



## Schism

By Catherine Asaro  
Tor, hardcover, \$25.95



Sagas don't make it to the tenth volume without something to recommend them. The momentum of its predecessors pushes Asaro's *Schism* (subtitled *Part One of Triad*) forward, though it is actually a prequel to these earlier tomes. Sadly, that slight irony is probably the most interesting aspect of the novel, especially to those who weren't absorbed by books one through nine. Spacefaring romantic fiction ("sigh-fi") is one of those niches without much room for dabblers, so readers who aren't interested in making sizable investments of time and interest are better served elsewhere.

*Schism* is not without charms—it's still a treat to see strong women protagonists, and the impatient dreamer Soz is all that and more. Furthermore, Asaro has crafted a universe that rivals in complexity and cohesion a certain galaxy far, far away. Still, the first-time reader is struck by unimaginative college-poetic descriptions like "their melodic voices flowing over him like sparkling water." The story is large and sprawling, with many side trips to fill in expository gaps left over from previous volumes. Soz forces her way towards her destiny, much of which has already been related, but there will inevitably be yet more to come as long as Asaro's fans ask for it.

—Rob Lightner

Never-ending stories:

- *The Wheel of Time*, by Robert Jordan
- *A Song of Ice and Fire*, by George R.R. Martin
- *The Beggars Trilogy*, by Nancy Kress



## To Light a Candle

By Mercedes Lackey and James Mallory  
Tor, hardcover, \$27.95



Critics' usual complaint about sprawling fantasy sagas is that they go on too long, milking characters and plots for book after repetitive book. But Mercedes Lackey and James Mallory's *Obsidian Trilogy* has the opposite problem: it unfolds too quickly for its own good.

Like its predecessor, *To Light a Candle* has several protagonists: elf-lord Jermyan and humans Kellen and Cilamen, heirs to three different magical legacies. Add two more with point-of-view status and a host of secondary players, and even at 650-plus pages there's scarcely room for anyone's story to be fully told.

Complicating matters, *Candle* straddles too many genres. Wide-ranging viewpoints and interwoven plots suggest an action thriller, but individual segments are so character-driven they undercut any suspense, especially since our heroes are supremely humble and incomparably skilled. They have to be; there's no space for them to develop at a plausible rate. Nor is there space, provided the authors adhere to the "trilogy" label, to fully explore the world they've created.

It's frustrating, because it's a rich world with an ingenious system of interlocking magics. But the authors are packing into three books a story that needs at least six.

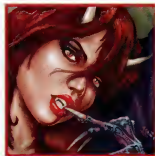
—John C. Bunnell

Better multivolume epics:

- *The Crown of Stars* series, by Kate Elliott
- *The Empire* series, by Raymond Feist and Janny Wurts
- *The Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn* series, by Tad Williams

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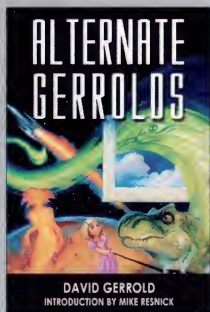
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## ALTERNATE GERROLDs

By David Gerrold  
BenBella, trade paperback, \$14.95



David Gerrold has two reputations in science fiction. He's legendary as the creator of *Star Trek's* tribbles and is respected as the leading 1970s-era author of strongly idea-driven novels including *When HARLIE Was One* and *The Man Who Folded Himself*. *Alternate Gerrolds* showcases a different side of his literary personality—that of a versatile, often ingenious writer of short fiction.

Though the collection is drawn mostly from themed anthologies edited by Mike Resnick, the range of material and subject matter is considerable. There's straight (alternate) history, as in the thoughtful and disquieting "The Impeachment of Adlai Stevenson" and "The Firebringers." There's poignant science fiction, as in "The Bauble" and "Riding Janis"—the latter from the remarkable anthology *Stars*. There's wicked satire, sometimes light ("The Seminar From Hell") and sometimes over-the-top ("The Kennedy Enterprise"). There's the purely strange, notably "Franz Kafka, Superhero!," wherein BugMan battles Sigmund Freud in a psychological showdown. And there's the hopeful in "The Wish," which may or may not explain why Gerrold's neighbors aren't as obnoxious as they used to be.

Not every entry is of equal weight: "A Wish for Smith" is merely an admittedly clever lawyer joke, and "The Feathered Mastodon" is a shaggy-dinosaur yarn full of writerly and fanish in-jokes. But when Gerrold isn't busy zinging Resnick, he draws engaging characters and thought-provoking conclusions, making *Alternate Gerrolds* a worthy compilation.

—John C. Bunnell

### Underrated Gerrolds:

- *The Flying Sorcerers* (with Larry Niven)
- *The Galactic Whirlpool*
- *Blood and Fire*



## Very Bad Deaths

By Spider Robinson  
Baen, hardcover, \$18.00



For fans of ingenious "what if?" storytelling, few writers can match Spider Robinson's sheer inventiveness. Yet few writers' prose and characters are also as predictable, and *Very Bad Deaths* continues to showcase his split personality.

As usual, the first-person narrator resembles Robinson. Newspaper columnist Russell Walker is a transplanted Easterner living on an island in British Columbia. Also as usual, he likes Heinlein and Niven and has superb taste in marijuana. And when weirdness whacks him on the nose, he takes it in stride.

That weirdness manifests two ways: There's Zandor "Smelly" Zudenigo's world-shattering personal stench, though that's merely his way of concealing a secret that perceptive readers—even if they steer clear of the jacket copy—will deduce before Walker reveals it. There's also the equally transcendent evil of serial torturer Allen Campbell, Mozart to de Sade's Salieri.

Robinson explores Zandor's gift with admirable logic and employs sharp instincts as Russell joins forces with a constable to thwart Allen's newest plans. In part because it is relentlessly logical, *Very Bad Deaths* is a short novel, though no less effective for being concise. As a thriller it's quick and competent—as science fiction, it's moderately thoughtful. But it treads no new ground.

—John C. Bunnell

### Better written SF mysteries:

- *Polar City Blues*, by Katharine Kerr
- *Dream Park*, by Larry Niven and Steven Barnes
- *Golden Fleece*, by Robert Sawyer



## The Wounded Hawk: The Crucible Series, Book Two

By Sara Douglass  
Tor, hardcover, \$27.95



In *The Wounded Hawk*, Sara Douglass continues her bodice-ripping history of Prince Hal as he seeks the thrones of England and France. The author introduces a doubting Thomas Neville, which brings a second plot, involving angels, to the fore. Unfortunately, this addition leaves the real characters poorer, removing too much human ingenuity and tarnishing Hal's glory in earning a throne of his own. As apocryphal history, angels work in the scenes with Joan of Arc, giving additional weight to her actions. But they also seem added simply to make the book fit the fantasy genre and because angels sell.

Since readers may already know the history, Douglass must build tension in other ways. Unfortunately, she passes over some momentous scenes too lightly, including the burning of the Savoy and the crushing of Hottspur at Orleans. And her major villain, Richard II, lacks any qualities like common sense that could cast doubt on his eventual overthrow.

Douglass's fast pacing enlivens both events and characters. She includes a glossary to help readers track people, places, and medieval terms. Skip past the supernatural elements and you'll enjoy this reenactment.

—Shelly Baur

### Magical medieval times:

- *The Archer's Tale*, by Bernard Cornwell
- *The Serpent Garden*, by Judith Merrile Riley
- *The Queen's Fod*, by Philippa Gregory



# AMAZING STORIES™

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## THE BOOK OF BALLADS

Written by Neil Gaiman, Delia Sherman, Charles de Lint, et al.

Illustrated by Charles Vess

Tar, hardcover, \$24.95



Music and comic books are inextricably linked, via both their history and many striking similarities in form. In the twentieth century, comics were heavily influenced by jazz, psychedelia, punk, and goth music, each leaving its impression and then moving on, as good tunes should. While it's true that music and comics appeal to different senses (and, some might say, sensibilities), each explores time and storytelling through parallel linear structures that have more in common than is perhaps immediately apparent. Graphic reinterpretations of music can offer such powerful synergy it's startling they don't appear more often.

Renowned artist Charles Vess presents thirteen folk ballads in the European tradition reworked as graphic stories in *The Book of Ballads*, and the fit is so natural that readers ignorant of the tales' origins would likely find no reason to suspect anything particularly unusual is going on. That's not to say this book is no different from any other collection of graphic stories—many pieces have been works in progress for centuries, and the effort shows in the strength of the narratives. Each is tightly plotted, packed with drama, and strongly resolved in only a few pages, which is more than can be said for many graphic stories today. Each interpretation is also followed by the ballad upon which it is based, and this typically offers the reader greater depth and insight into the authors' work.

Vess has won major awards for his contributions to Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* and *Stardust* (as well as many other projects), and he shows off his range with delight in these tales. From the grim, Beardsleyan work in "Tam-Lin," which the artist also scripted, to lighthearted flashes of

Winsor McCay in the darker-than-dark "Three Lovers," written by Lee Smith, Vess draws with rare confidence and complexity, seducing the reader into lingering well after the words have been absorbed.

Working with writers like Gaiman, Delia Sherman (*The Porcelain Dove*), and Charles de Lint (*The Blue Girl*) would be a coup for any visual artist, but here the honor is plainly mutual. All the authors respect both their sources and the artist, and more often than not are content to fade into the background and let Vess run wild. Most of the stories have appeared previously in four issues of *The Book of Ballads* and *Sagas* from Green Man Press, but the four new ones, as well as Terri Windling's informative introduction and Ken Roseman's inspired discography, make this volume essential reading.

—Rob Lightner

### Try *The Book of Ballads* if you liked:

- *Sandman*, written by Neil Gaiman, illustrated by Mike Dringenberg, Michael Zulli, et al.
- *Rose*, written by Jeff Smith, illustrated by Charles Vess
- *Little Nema* in *Slumberland*, written and illustrated by Winsor McCay



## Tales of the Vampires

Written by Joss Whedon, Drew Goddard, Jane Espenson, Ben Edlund, et al.  
Illustrated by Alex Sanchez, Scott Morse, Jason Alexander, Tim Sale, et al.  
Dark Horse, trade paperback, \$15.95



Easily the most impressive achievement among the many triumphs of Joss Whedon's *Buffalo the Vampire Slayer* was its dexterous long-term character development. While many series leave their main characters trapped in eerie time loops, afraid to mess with the "formula," *Buffalo* and her friends accumulated palpable and plausible growth rings across their seven seasons of service. By the midway point, just about every episode contained a delightful joke, sight gag, or epiphany that worked only because we knew the characters so well.

This anthology from Dark Horse, which collects the five individual *Tales of the Vampire* comic books, kicks out the character-development crutch, challenging Whedon and his coconspirators to write short stories that make the *Buffalo*verse work as an engine fueled only by plot and theme. Fortunately, almost every adventure passes the test.

*Tales* consists of eleven disparate vampire yarns, most of which introduce all-new bloodsuckers. In fact, those few entries that unpack the familiar television characters are the weakest—Drew Goddard puts Spike and Dru through their paces, Brett Matthews tries on Angel like a Gap sweater, and Goddard returns with Dracula in tow to show us what *Buffalo* and Xander have been up to since the series wound down. Still, what's most interesting is how well the *Buffalo* writing staff adapts to the comics medium (admittedly, Ben Edlund wrote comics before he made the jump to TV). Most of them proudly display their associates' degrees from the Alan Moore School of Comics Scripting but never lose their own voices. Just about everybody shows far more facility with panels, captions, and dialogue than the average DC or Marvel scribbler. Particularly impressive is Jane Espenson, whose contributions "Spot the Vampire" and "Dust Bowl" are the anthology's shiniest gems.

*Tales* is a great shot of methadone for *Buffalo* fanatics who still miss their Tuesday-night fix.

—Ray Winninger

### Other comics from *Buffalo* writers:

- *The Tick*, written and illustrated by Ben Edlund
- *The Lone Gunmen*, written by Jane Espenson, illustrated by Paul Lee
- *Fray*, written by Joss Whedon, illustrated by Karl Moline



## The Amazing Adventures of the Escapist Volume Two

Written by Brian K. Vaughan, Mary Wolfman, Kevin McCarthy, et al.  
Illustrated by Joe Staton, Dean Haspiel, Steve Conley, et al.  
Dark Horse, trade paperback, \$17.95



The *Amazing Adventures of the Escapist Volume Two* collects the third and fourth issues of the pricey Dark Horse anthology series derived from Michael Chabon's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. In bringing Chabon's superheroes to four-color life, the writers and artists participating in these anthologies must contend with a conundrum complicated enough to daunt even the titular Master of Elusion. Each issue features original stories about the Escapist, Luna Moth, and the rest, rendered as if they were reprints of classic works from bygone eras. But the compact narrative approach most common in comics' golden and silver ages clashes with the much more leisurely, cinematic pacing of today's storytelling style, leaving the creators trapped between the expectations of the modern audience and the demands of convincing pastiche.

"The Trial of Judy Dark," a tale by Kevin McCarthy with art from Dean Haspiel, manages to serve both masters, delivering a solid story and an homage to Jack Kirby's 1960s work for Marvel. Far less successful is the EC-inspired "Hell and Fear Well," which runs twice the length of the typical "New Direction" yarn and suffers accordingly. The most complex stories—such as "The Escapist 2966" by Stuart Moore and Steve Conley—work within the faux-reprint concept but spice their retro content with thematic discourse on traps and escapes, from the repetitious nature of serial narratives to the emotional snares of alcoholism and child abuse. Still, the overall air of gravitas makes the collection less fun than it should be, given the praise of purely "escapist" comics in the original Chabon novel.

—James Lowder

### More retro comics fun:

- *Radioactive Man*, written by Steve Vance, Batton Lash, et al., illustrated by Steve Vance, Hilary Barta, et al.
- *Big Bang Comics*, written by Gary Carlson et al., illustrated by Chris Eckert et al.
- *1963*, written by Alan Moore, illustrated by Rick Veitch, Dave Gibbons, et al.

# FEBRUARY 1984

The dawn of 1984 brings inevitable comparisons with another 1984—the dystopian society of George Orwell's cautionary 1949 novel. (A new film adaptation of the novel will debut in October 1984—though it doesn't open in the United States until the following February.) There is little consensus among those comparing the novel with reality; many are relieved that Orwell's totalitarian society remains fiction, while others argue that the ever-watchful Big Brother and dehumanization of the novel are well on their way to coming true in the real world.

Promoting that notion to front-page news, even for those who are unaware of 1984, is the February 9 death of USSR General Secretary Yuri Andropov and his replacement four days later by Konstantin Chernenko, who had been the director of personnel in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's General Department, allowing him to supervise wiretaps and surveillance cameras in government offices—to a certain extent, within the Soviet government, he was Big Brother.

The space race offers brighter prospects. Four days into the early-February mission designated STS-41B, US astronauts Bruce McCandless II and Robert Lee Stewart execute the first untethered space walk. McCandless and Stewart utilize Manned Maneuvering Units (MMUs) for the extravehicular excursion. One particular photo of McCandless will become an iconic image that for the next two decades will be found illustrating books, articles, and computer desktops. Use of MMUs may constitute baby steps in the progress of space technology, but to science-fiction fans and space-program supporters still anxious to realize the promises of space travel, it constitutes giant steps for mankind. Sadly, the tragic destruction of the Challenger shuttle less than two years later will become the program's corresponding "two steps backward."



## IN THE PAGES OF AMAZING STORIES

In early 1984, *Amazing Science Fiction Stories* and *Fantastic Stories* (formerly known as *Fantastic Adventures*) are published together as a single bimonthly publication. The titles are owned by Dragon Publishing, a division of TSR, the company that produces the *Dungeons & Dragons* roleplaying game. George Scithers is the editor, and much of the art is executed by George Barr.

The lead story of the January/February 1984 issue, "Gateway III—Beyond the Gate," by Frederik Pohl, is actually the first part of the novel *Heechee Rendezvous*; it episodically deals with many characters whose diverse lives begin to come together in matters related to the technology left behind by the long-missing Heechee civilization.

In "Yawn," Wayne Wightman tells of a man who begins to suspect that his neighbor is harboring an alien... and of how the man's investigation leads to horrible and unanticipated consequences.

Keith Roberts's "Kitemaster" imagines an alternate universe where kite-based aviation serves a theocracy, and enigmatically mixes wartime burnout with theological crises.

Sharon Webb's "With Gl-oon'sha, Dreams Come" chronicles, in melancholy fashion, the years-long correspondence between an Earth boy and an alien girl.

In "Ice Age," Michael Swanwick (whose introduction indicates that he is working on his first novel) describes the curious things witnessed in an inherited refrigerator.

"The Demon Queen," by Phyllis Eisenstein, tells of a besieged castle, its ruler, his wife, and an advisor, all of whom pay the price for betrayal.

The last story of the issue, "Through Space and Time with Ferdinand Feghoot II," by Grendel Briarton, is, of course, a Feghoot.

In Opinion, Robert Silverberg explains how he came to write a sequel to *Lord Valentine's Castle*, despite having all but vowed never to do so. Robert Bloch lyrically relives his relationship with the magazines in "Fantastic Adventures with *Amazing*," and Alan Dean Foster offers "A Critique of Return of the Jedi" (in which he concludes, "By and large the execution does not live up to the promise").



## NOTABLE FIGURES Who Died This Month

- February 4: Anna Anderson, age 87, whose claim that she was the Russian Grand Duchess Anastasia Romanov, miraculously surviving daughter of Tsar Nicholas, will inspire endless speculation and two big-budget movies (the live-action *Anastasia* from 1956 and the animated *Anastasia* from 1997); DNA tests will eventually disprove her claim
- February 5: Roberto Guzman Huerta, age 66, who became an iconic hero of Mexico by wrestling and acting under the name El Santo
- February 14: Edward Dein, age 76, writer of many exploitation thrillers from the 1940s and 1950s (including his last theatrical film, *Curse of the Undead*, which he also directed)
- February 29: Ken Strickfaden, age 87, who built electrical props for movies ranging from 1931's *Frankenstein* to 1973's *Blockbuster*



## IN THE NEWS

- February 7: A twelve-year-old boy named David, better-known to the world as the "boy in the plastic bubble," is released from his sterile environment. Having received a bone-marrow transplant to cure his immune-deficiency disorder, he is considered healthy enough to live outside that environment. Unfortunately, David dies of infections two weeks later.
- February 28: Michael Jackson takes home seven Grammy Awards for his *Thriller* album, the title track of which had been made into a horror video directed by John Landis (*An American Werewolf in London*).

## ON THE SILVER SCREEN

Among the science-fiction, fantasy, and horror efforts reaching US screens is *Cave Dwellers*, the follow-up to *Ator, the Fighting Eagle*. This low-budget sword-and-sorcery flick will remain largely ignored by American audiences until it is lampooned years later on an episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

Other films released at this time include *Blame It on Rita*, *Unfaithfully Yours*, and *Reckless*.

David Lynch's *Dune*, not due for release until late in the year, wraps principal photography on February 8.

## ON THE SMALL SCREEN

Prime-time science fiction is mostly just a variant of light-hearted action and detective series—dressed up with high-tech combat vehicles.

- Airwolf**, the *Blue Thunder*-inspired series about a pilot and his overequipped combat helicopter, debuted at the end of January. It will air on CBS for a couple of years, then move to cable with a new cast.
- Knight Rider**, David Hasselhoff's first prime-time vehicle, casts the actor as Michael Knight, ex-cop and driver of KITT, an armed, armored, talking automobile. *Knight Rider* has been on the air since the start of the 1982 broadcast season and will remain on the air until season's end in 1986.
- Fantasy Island**, the series about an island resort and the manager whose mystical influence causes guests to get pretty much what they deserve, is nearing the end of its run.
- Action series include *The A-Team*, recounting the adventures of on-the-lam Vietnam vets whose bullets mostly cause the bad guys to duck; *Magnum, P.I.*, about detective Thomas Magnum and his investigations in Hawaii; *Remington Steele*, about a female detective and the man of mystery (future James Bond actor Pierce Brosnan) she hires to portray the agency owner she invented; and *Scorecrow and Mrs. King*, starring *Dark Shadows* alumnus Kate Jackson and future *Babylon 5* leader Bruce Boxleitner as a divorcee and a government spy working together on espionage cases.



## IN THE BOOKSTORES

New genre fiction on the shelves includes Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Web of Darkness*, Octavia E. Butler's *Clay's Ark*, Barbara Hambly's *The Ladies of Mandrigny*, Keith Laumer's *The Galaxy Builder*, Tanith Lee's *Tamastara*, Mike Resnick's *The Branch*, and Joan Vinge's *World's End*.

Jack L. Chalker is starting two new series with *The River of the Dancing Gods* and *Spirits of Flux and Anchor*. First-time novelists debuting include Jennifer Roberson (with *Shapechangers*) and Kim Stanley Robinson (with *The Wild Shore*).

Anthology fiction is well represented, with two collections edited or coedited by Isaac Asimov (*The Great SF Stories 11* and *Machines That Think*), a crime and mystery collection from Ray Bradbury (*A Memory of Murder*), Terry Carr's *Best from "Universe,"* and several others.

Sempiternographic SF is in vogue, with *The Planet Murderer* (the sixteenth Spaceway novel by John Cleve, a pen name of Andrew J. Offutt) debuting at about the same time as *Players of Gar*, the twentieth novel in John Norman's bondage-oriented series.

## IN THE FUNNY PAPERS

At Marvel Comics, in issue 7 of the X-Men spin-off *Alpha Flight*, John Byrne is handling the scripting, pencilling, and inking; Byrne is also fully in charge of *The Fantastic Four*, where the Thing searches for the Human Torch in issue 263.

Captain America is having trouble with the Red Skull in issue 290. *The Spectacular Spider-Man* 86 teases its readers with the notion that Spidey will unmask for the Black Cat. In *The Mighty Thor* 340, Beta Ray Bill receives his own Uru hammer. Chris Claremont scripts *The Uncanny X-Men* 178 featuring Mystique and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.

Elektra, spinning off from *Daredevil*, is beginning her own four-issue Elektra Saga, with Frank Miller pencilling and inking.

Conan the Barbarian continues old-school sword-and-sorcery in issue 155 and in the magazine-sized *Savage Sword of Conan* 97. Marvel's *Star Wars*, currently at issue 80, has a couple of years to go.

At DC, Gil Kane is pencilling and inking *Action Comics*. In *Batman* 368 and *Detective Comics* 535, Jason Todd is seeking to establish an identity of his own. In *The Flash* 330, the superspeedster is dealing with the hairiest of his Rogues' Gallery, Gorilla Grodd. Meanwhile, in *Superman* 392, the Man of Steel is trying to save Lana Lang again.

The New Teen Titans (issues 39) are still in their glory days, scripted by Marv Wolfman and pencilled by George Perez, but in just a couple of issues the title's name will change to *Tales of the Teen Titans*; several issues after that, the comic will become a reprint title.

Eagle Comics is publishing the fourth issue of Brian Bolland's innovative (and violent) *Judge Dredd*.

WaRP Graphics' original *ElfQuest* series is nearing the end of its run with issue 18 of 21. (The capitalization of WaRP derives from the initials of its owners, *ElfQuest's* scripting and art team, Wendy and Richard Pini.)



# Q&A GREGORY BENFORD

## Red Planet Reveries

by Darrell Schweitzer



Gregory Benford is a physicist and the author of the hard-science-fiction classic *Timescape*, in addition to *In the Ocean of Night*, *The Morton Race*, and many other works. He has twice won the Nebula Award and has been nominated for the Hugo Award multiple times.

**We appear to be in a golden age of astronomical studies, with new planets and new details about the solar system being discovered seemingly every day. Is it also a golden age for interplanetary science fiction?**

It could be. Of course when you do something first, it has the highest shine, and we've been talking about interplanetary exploration for a century. In fact, I just finished a novel called *The Sunborn*, which tries to explain the categories of life in the solar system. It starts on Mars and ends up beyond Pluto. It's a sequel to *The Martian Race*, and will appear in March 2005.

What particularly bothers me about interplanetary exploration from my work with NASA is that the so-called planetary-protection faction is gaining so much control that some people—biologists included—are actually saying that we should never send humans to any other astronomical body for fear of contamination perils. The idea that we shouldn't go to Mars because there might be anaerobes beneath the surface is, I think, fundamentally loony.

**What's next for you?**

After *The Sunborn*, I am going to go back to close-focus, near-future stuff. There's plenty we don't understand about the solar system. For example, Titan's low-temperature organic environment: could life arise there? Activation energies matter more than temperature at such extremes, and nobody knows what organic processes occur naturally. So with four billion years to work on it, the ethane lakes and methane air of Titan might have found a way to kindle life.

**Do you think science fiction can influence the way we go about exploring the universe? Can your novels help get people to say, "Hey, we want to go to Mars"?**

I try to frame the issues so the public can see them clearly. There is no grand scientific issue to be settled by going back to the Moon, but there is for Mars. Developing a big booster to send a few expeditions to the Moon might be cost-effective and smart, because we will need it for Mars—which is a true, primary scientific goal. But skip the base.

A past director of NASA said to me years ago that he thought the agency had about a decade to prove itself. Around 2010 the baby boomers will start to retire and the federal budget will come under greater pressure. NASA could slowly wither. We cannot count on sustaining interest for decades without the drama of human involvement. "It has to venture," he said.

**That being the case, how do you balance art against polemical purpose?**

Searching for life is the grandest space venture, and the public knows it. Many biologists believe life, if it began on Mars, would have migrated from the increasingly hostile surface to the warmer subsurface world. Did life arise on Mars? Is it still there? These are some of the major questions we could answer, scientific riddles everyone understands.

Going to Mars can be a defining moment in the twenty-first century [in the same way that] Apollo was for the twentieth. It's a challenge worthy of us—tough, dangerous, and thrilling. To discover subsurface fossils—or living organisms—demands that human "marsnavts" descend into ancient volcanic vents. No robot can do this or even drill effectively to the depths required.

Mars within one generation—twenty years—certainly lies within our grasp. And with advanced communications, we can all go along, following our explorers every day, on TV and the Internet, as they search the canyons of a new world for signs of ancient life.

**So how do we move that adventure from science fiction to scientific reality?**

It's time for NASA to admit what everybody really knows—that space is dangerous: Mars even more so. Boring flights to orbit have robbed us of drama, even though we know there can always be another shuttle mishap. Mars can electrify the world precisely because we will once again be venturing into the truly unknown, in high and risky style. Such an adventure has grandeur appropriate to the advanced nations, who should do it together.

[Sending people to Mars] could settle deep scientific questions with immense philosophical, and even theological, overtones. How easily does life start on Earthlike worlds? Are we rare in the cosmos? Was our creation unique? Finding the answers would mark our time and set the tone of the century. **AS**

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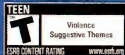
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